

Rediscovering Harappa | Through the Five Elements

A Special Exhibition at the Lahore Museum



Rediscovering Harappa: Through the Five Elements

Edited by Tehnyat Majeed

Inheriting Harappa Project

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The ancient Indus civilisation was initially excavated by the Archaeological Survey of India in the mid-1920s at Harappa in the Punjab and Mohenjodaro in Sind: buried cities 600km apart near the Indus River and its tributaries. Today, it includes more than a thousand sites and covers an area about twice the size of its equivalent in Egypt or Mesopotamia. It flourished in what is now Pakistan and India from 2500 to 1900 BC, with remarkable achievements in architecture, crafts, trade and water technology—two millennia ahead of ancient Roman hydrological engineering—not to mention the probable absence of palaces for a ruling elite and the definite absence of weapons and armour for warfare.

Yet it has suffered from a puzzlingly insignificant public reputation in both countries, particularly Pakistan. For example, the Indus civilisation went unmentioned before the 1947 partition of the subcontinent in the speeches and writings of Pakistan's founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who visited neither Harappa nor Mohenjodaro—an astonishing omission, also true of India's nationalist leader Mohandas Gandhi, though not its first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who was an eloquent Indus admirer. Since 1947, school textbooks in Pakistan have underrepresented the civilisation compared to other ancient civilisations/historical eras. Only a handful of Pakistani archaeologists, most notably Rafique Mughal, have contributed to its academic study, while Pakistan's museums have devoted scant attention to its imaginative display.

In the frank, and important, words of Pakistani art historian Tehnyat Majeed—a specialist in late medieval Islamic art of the Middle East, trained in the UK and the USA, who fell for the Indus civilisation only in 2014—'we have become completely disconnected' from the Indus inheritance. 'Harappa is

marginalised, neglected, and seen as part of the rival "other"—the Hindu religio-historical legacy of the subcontinent. While Indians consciously appropriated this past immediately after the partition in 1947, we in Pakistan dissociated ourselves from it. Our ties to these historical roots have been severed because Harappan culture does not directly connect to the Islamic religious and cultural legacy of South Asia.'

Rediscovering Harappa, edited by Majeed with contributions from many other Pakistanis, is the highly illustrated catalogue of a pioneering Indus exhibition curated by Majeed at the Lahore Museum, Pakistan's oldest and most cosmopolitan cultural institution, which took place in 2016 with the enlightened support of UNESCO's International Fund for the Promotion of Culture. It naturally focuses on the major Indus collections in the museum from Harappa, Mohenjodaro, and a few other sites, deposited in Lahore before 1947 but only now being systematically catalogued. Yet it offers more than just art and archaeology. Its aim is nothing less than to kindle the reconnection of Pakistanis with their Indus roots.

For example, it includes accurate and beautiful replicas of painted Indus pottery, created by Muhammad Nawaz, a simple village potter from Harappa who trained from 1986 with US archaeologist Jonathan Mark Kenoyer during his re-excavation of Harappa. In 1996, Kenoyer donated the replicas to the Lahore Museum. In 2006, Nawaz showed photographs of them to the internationally known Lahore-based potter Sheherezade Alam, who commissioned further replicas. After Nawaz's untimely death in 2013, Alam approached Majeed with the idea of an exhibition commemorating Nawaz, which was then transformed into an exhibition about the Indus civilisation as a whole.

It also includes artworks by Pakistani students of art, archaeology, and history inspired by the museum's collection who interned with the project, such as a terracotta model of the Great Bath at Mohenjodaro, and drawings of carved Indus sealstones with exquisite images of animals, including the elephant and celebrated 'unicorn', adjacent to the tantalising signs of the undeciphered Indus script. Children—photographed in the book hard at play—joined intern-led tours of the exhibition and pottery workshops.

In other words, *Rediscovering Harappa* is not your average exhibition catalogue. A charming, if sometimes erratic, mixture of the ancient and the modern, it tries to foster the growth of tolerance and culture in a nation that has recently gone to the opposite extreme, by bringing to life a mysteriously creative, apparently very tolerant, four-millennia-old 'Pakistani' civilisation. ■

Andrew Robinson is the author of *The Indus: Lost Civilizations*

FURTHER INFORMATION

A free download is available through their website: www.inheritingharappa.com
For printed copies, contact Zeb Bilal at Lahore Museum: zebtariq@gmail.com