Indus Valley Civilization: Crash Course World History #2

Crash Course: World History
https://youtube.com/watch?v=n7ndRwqJYDM
https://nerdfighteria.info/v/n7ndRwqJYDM

=====Intro (0:00)=====

Hi, I'm John Green and this is Crash Course World History. Let's begin today with a question. Why am I alive? Also, why don't I have any eyes, ah that's better.

The way we answer that question ends up organizing all kinds of other thoughts, like what we should value, and how we should behave, and if we should eat meat, and whether we should dump that boy who is very nice, but insanely clingy in a way that he can not possibly think is attractive. All of which...

Past John: Mr. Green, Mr. Green. Uh, uh a-are you talking about me?

Present John: Yes, I am talking about you, Me from the Past; I am telling you that one of the reasons we study history is so that you can be a less terrible boyfriend, but more on that momentarily.

(Intro)

=====What is Civilization (0:41)=====

Today we're going to talk about civilizations, but in order to do that we have to talk about talking about civilizations, because it's a problematic word. So problematic, in fact, that I have to turn to camera two to discuss it. Certain conglomerations of humans are seen as civilizations, where as, say nomadic cultures generally aren't. Unless you are, say it with me, the Mongols. [Mongoltage]

By calling some groups civilizations, you imply that all other social orders are uncivilized, which is basically just another way of saying they're savages or barbarians. Side note - originally, in Greek, the word barbarian denoted anyone who didn't speak ancient Greek, because to the Greeks, all other languages sounded like, “bar bar bar bar bar bar bar.” So that is to say, we're all basically barbarians except for the classics majors, which is worth remembering when we're discussing civilizations.

Civilizations are like most of things we like to study, they're intellectual constructs. No one woke up in the city of Thebes in Egypt one morning and said "What a beautiful morning; I sure am living at the height of Egyptian civilization!" Still, they’re useful constructs, particularly when you're comparing one civilization to another. They're less useful when you're comparing a civilization to a non-civilization type social order, which is why we will try to avoid that. And yes, I'm getting to the good boyfriend stuff; patience, grasshopper.

So what is a civilization? Well, diagnosing a civilization is a little like diagnosing an illness. If you have four or more of the following symptoms, you might be a civilization:

Surplus production - once one person can make enough food to feed several people, it becomes possible to build a city. Another symptom of civilization.

It also leads to the specialization of labor, which in turn leads to trade. If everybody picks berries for a living, then there's no need to trade, because I have berries and you have berries. But, if I pick berries for a living, and you make hammers, suddenly we have cause to trade.

Civilizations are also usually associated with social stratification, centralized government, shared values (generally in the form of religion), and writing. And, at least in the early days, they were almost always associated with rivers.

These days, you can just bisect a segment of land horizontally and vertically and, boom, build a city. But 5,000 years ago, civilizations were almost always associated with rivers. Whether that's the Tigris and the Euphrates, the Yellow River, the Nile, the Amazon Basin, the Coatzacoalcos - Gaaah! I was doing so good until I got to Coatzacoalcos!

[Computer: Coatzacoalcos]

Coatzacoalcos, maybe. Why river valleys? They're flat, they're well watered, and when they flood, they deposit nutrient-rich silt. We'll have more to say about most of these civilizations later, but let's talk about this guy, the Indus Valley Civilization, 'cause it's my all-time favorite.

The Indus Valley Civilization was located in the floodplain of the Indus and Sarasvati rivers, and it was about the best place in the world to have an ancient civilization, because the rivers flooded very reliably twice a year, which meant that it had the most available calories per acre of pretty much anywhere on the planet.

We know the Indus Valley civilization flourished a long time ago, probably around 3000 BCE. Why is that question literally hanging over my head? But people of the Indus Valley were trading with Mesopotamians as early as 3500 BCE. We also know that it was the largest of the ancient civilizations; archaeologists have discovered more than 1500 sites. So what do we know about this civilization? Let's go to the Thought Bubble.

=====Thought Bubble (3:39)=====

Everything we know about the Indus Valley Civilization comes from archaeology, because while they did use written language, we don't know how to read it, and no Rosetta Stone has thus far appeared to help us learn it. I meant the other Rosetta Stone, Thought Bubble, yeah. Although, come to think of it, either would be acceptable. So here's what we know:

They had amazing cities. Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro are the best known, with dense, multi-story homes constructed out of uniformly sized bricks along perpendicular streets. I mean, this wasn't some ancient world version of Houston, more like Chicago. This means they must have had some form of government and zoning, but we don't know what gave this government its authority.

Cities were oriented to catch the wind and provide a natural form of air conditioning. And they were clean - most homes were connected to a centralized drainage system that used gravity to carry waste and water out of the city in big sewer ditches that ran under main avenues, a plumbing system that would have been the envy of many 18th-century European cities.

Also, in Mohenjo-Daro, the largest public building was not a temple or a palace, but a public bath, which historians call the Great Bath. We don't know what the Great Bath was used for, but since later Indian culture placed a huge emphasis on ritual purity, which is the basis for the caste system, some historians have speculated the bath might have been like a giant baptismal pool.

Also, they traded. One of the coolest things that the Indus Valley Civilization produced were seals used as identification markers on goods and clay tablets. These seals contained the writing that we still can't decipher, and a number of fantastic designs, many featuring animals and monsters.

One of the most famous and frightening is of a man with what looks like water buffalo horns on his head, sitting cross-legged between a tiger and a bull. We don't know what's really going on here, but it's safe to say that this was a powerful dude, because he seems to be

able to control the tiger.

How do these seals let us know that they traded? Well, because we found them in Mesopotamia, not the Indus Valley. Plus, archaeologists have found stuff like bronze in the Indus Valley that is not native to the region. So what did they trade? Cotton cloth. Still such a fascinating export, incidentally, that it will be the subject of the 40th and final video in this very series.

But here's the most amazing thing about the Indus Valley people: they were peaceful. Despite archaeologists finding 1500 sites, they have found very little evidence of warfare and almost no weapons. Thanks, Thought Bubble.

=====Open Letter (5:50)=====

Okay, before we talk about the fascinating demise of the Indus Valley civilization, it's time for the Open Letter.

Magic! I wonder what the secret compartment has for me today? Oh! Fancy clothes. I guess the secret compartment didn't think I was dressed up enough for the occasion. An Open Letter to Historians.

Dear Historians,

The Great Bath? Really? The Great Bath? I'm trying to make history fascinating and you give me a term that evokes scented candles, bath salts and Frédéric Fekkai hair products?

I know sometimes the crushingly boring names of history aren't your fault. You didn't name the Federalist Papers or the Austro-Hungarian Empire or Adam Smith, but when you DO get a chance to name something, you go with The Great Bath? Not the Epic Bath of Mohenjo-Daro, or the Bath To End All Baths, or The Pool That Ruled, or The Moist Mystery of Mohenjo-Daro, or The Wet Wonder?

The Great Bath? Really?! You can do better!

Best wishes, John Green

=====What happened to the Indus Valley Civilization? (6:52)=====

So what happened to these people? Well, here's what didn't happen to them: They didn't morph into the current residents of that area of the world, Hindu Indians or Muslim Pakistanis. Those people probably came from the Caucasus.

Instead, sometime around 1750 BCE, the Indus Valley Civilization declined until it faded into obscurity. Why? Historians have three theories.

1. Conquest! It turns out to be a terrible military strategy not to have any weapons, and it's possible people from the Indus Valley were completely overrun by people from the Caucasus.

2. Environmental Disaster! It's possible they brought about their own end by destroying their environment.

3. Earthquake! The most interesting theory is that a massive earthquake changed the course of the rivers so much that a lot of the tributaries dried up. Without adequate water supplies for irrigation, the cities couldn't sustain themselves, so people literally picked up and left for greener pastures.

Well, probably not pastures; it's unlikely they became nomads. They probably just moved to a different plain and continued their agricultural ways. I am already boring you, and I haven't even told you yet how to be a better boy- and/or girlfriend. I'm going to do that now.

=====Why John is a terrible boyfriend (7:50)=====

So we don't know why the Indus Valley Civilization ended, but we also don't really know why it started. Why did these people build cities, and dig swimming pools, and make unnecessarily ornate seals? Were they motivated by hunger, fear, a desire for companionship, the need to be near their sacred spaces, or a general feeling that city life was just more awesome than foraging?

Thinking about what motivated them to structure their life as they did helps us to think about how we structure our own lives. In short, you're clingy because you're motivated by fear and a need for companionship, and she finds it annoying because it's enough work having to be responsible for herself without having to also be responsible for you.

Also, you're not really helping her by clinging, and from the Indus Valley in the Bronze Age, to school life today, human life is all about collaboration. Trading cloth for bronze, building cities together, and collaborating to make sure that human lives are tilted to catch the wind.

Next week, we will travel here to discuss the Hot Mess-o-Potamia, but in the meantime, if you have any questions, leave them in comments, and our team of semi-trained semi-professionals will do their best to answer them.

Also, you'll find some suggested resources in the video info below, he said, pointing at his pants. Thanks for watching, and we'll see you next week!

=====Credits (9:00)=====

Today's episode of Crash Course was produced and directed by Stan Muller, the show is written by my high school history teacher Raoul Meyer and myself, our graphics team is Thought Bubble, and our script supervisor is Danica Johnson.

Last week's phrase of the week was "double cheeseburger." If you want to take a guess at this week's phrase of the week, you can do so in comments, where you can also suggest new phrases of the week.

And if you have any questions about today's show, you can leave them in comments where our team of semi-professional quasi-historians will endeavor to answer them.

Thanks for watching, and as we say in my hometown, Don't Forget To Be Awesome.