

**Chapter 3 Viewpoint Activity**

As they excavate a site, archaeologists try to get an idea of the culture and everyday life of the people who lived there. This is more difficult for a culture such as the Indus Valley, whose writing cannot yet be read (textbook pages 51–53). Most early investigators concluded that the well-organized cities suggested a repressive, strictly controlled government. More recently, a new explanation has been suggested. ♦ *As you read, think about the evidence that each writer uses. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

**Did Democracy Begin in the Indus Valley?**

**The Traditional Interpretation** Another mark of the Indus state is the “miles of monotony” that so appalled [Sir Mortimer] Wheeler. As already suggested, that monotony applies chiefly to the main streets, and things were not so neatly laid out in living areas off the main streets. Yet there does seem to have been a basic sameness among Indus centers which implies the existence of a master plan or blueprint, a single agreed-upon way of doing things, conceived and carried out by skilled architects and builders.

As Fairservis emphasizes, it implies a good deal more: “One cannot but be impressed with the urban order, the modular planning, the uniformity of the great . . . sites. . . . Rather it is as if each segment of the population knew precisely that there was only one way to live together—by conformity to a time-honored plan given its validity by one’s forefathers.”

**Another Viewpoint** In all the highly developed civilizations of the past . . . the pervasive influence of an imperial authority can be felt, providing patronage for the arts and directing the evolution of society. A close examination of the archaeological discoveries

made in the Indus Valley seems to belie the presence of such an imperial authority in this civilization. . . . Yet although it seems to have lacked an authoritarian regime, the Indus civilization had a well-disciplined way of life, civic controls and an organizational system which could only have stemmed from the kind of “rule by the people” that was exercised in some

Greek city-states some 2,000 years later. Did Greece give birth to democracy, or did Greece simply follow a practice developed earlier?

. . . The main argument in support of this thesis is the existence of well-established norms and standards which would have required the consensus of the people if they had not been imposed by an authoritarian

regime. . . . In the two major cities. . . the gridiron pattern of street layout uncovered by archaeological excavations shows how much consideration was given to the safety and security of the residents and suggests the existence of a highly developed and well-monitored civic control system.

Source: (1) *The Emergence of Society*, by John E. Pfeiffer (McGraw Hill, 1977); (2) “The Indus Valley civilization—cradle of democracy,” by Syed A. Naqvi (*UNESCO Courier*, February 1993).

**Questions to Discuss**

1. What similar evidence about the cities do these writers mention?
2. What was the traditional explanation of this evidence in terms of the kind of government and culture in the Indus Valley? What is the new explanation?
3. **Formulating Questions** If you were investigating everyday life in the Indus Valley cities, what questions would you want to ask? How might they help answer the question of the kind of government that these cities developed?