

Mehrgarh

Mehrgarh (Balochi: *Mehrgarh*; Pashto: مهړګړ‎; Urdu: مہرگڑھ‎), sometimes anglicized as **Mehergarh** or **Mehrgar**, is a Neolithic (7000 BCE to c. 2500/2000 BCE) site located near the Bolan Pass on the Kacchi Plain of Balochistan, Pakistan, to the west of the Indus River valley.^[1]

The earliest settlement at Mehrgarh, in the northeast corner of the 495-acre (2.00 km²) site, was a small farming village which was inhabited from circa 6500 BCE.^[2] It is one of the earliest sites with evidence of farming and herding in South Asia.^{[3][4]} The site was discovered in 1974 by an archaeological team led by French archaeologists Jean-François Jarrige and Catherine Jarrige, and was excavated continuously between 1974 and 1986, and again from 1997 to 2000. Archaeological material has been found in six mounds, and about 32,000 artifacts have been collected.^[2]

Mehrgarh is now seen as a precursor to the Indus Valley Civilization, displaying the whole sequence from earliest settlement and the start of agriculture, to the mature Harappan Civilisation.

Mehrgarh

مهړګړه
مهړګړ



Shown within Balochistan, Pakistan



Mehrgarh (Pakistan)

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History

Alternate name	Mehrgahr, Merhgarh, Merhgahr
Location	Dhadar, Balochistan, Pakistan
Coordinates	29°23′N 67°37′E
History	
Founded	Approximately 7000 BCE
Abandoned	Approximately 2600 BCE
Periods	Neolithic
Site notes	
Excavation dates	1974–1986, 1997–2000

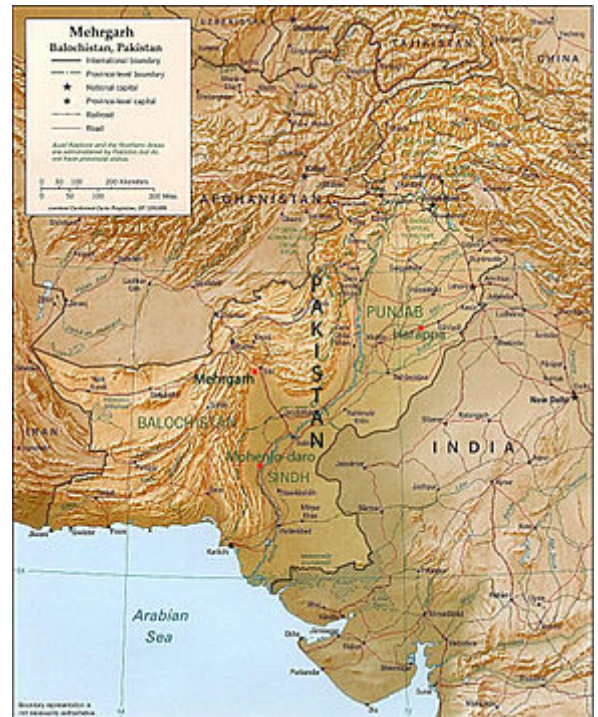
Jean-Francois Jarrige argues for an independent origin of Mehrgarh. Jarrige notes "the assumption that farming economy was introduced full-fledged from Near-East to South Asia,"^{[5][note 1]} and the similarities between Neolithic sites from eastern Mesopotamia and the western Indus valley, which are evidence of a "cultural continuum" between those sites. But given the originality of Mehrgarh, Jarrige concludes that Mehrgarh has an earlier local background," and is not a "'backwater' of the Neolithic culture of the Near East."^[5]

Archaeologists	Jean-François Jarrige, Catherine Jarrige
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According to Lukacs and Hemphill, while there is a strong continuity between the neolithic and chalcolithic (Copper Age) cultures of Mehrgarh, dental evidence shows that the chalcolithic population did not descend from the neolithic population of Mehrgarh,^[22] which "suggests moderate levels of gene flow"^[22] They wrote that "the direct lineal descendents of the Neolithic inhabitants of Mehrgarh are to be found to the south and the east of Mehrgarh, in northwestern India and the western edge of the Deccan plateau," with neolithic Mehrgarh showing greater affinity with chalcolithic Inamgaon, south of Mehrgarh, than with chalcolithic Mehrgarh.^{[22][note 2]}

Gallego Romero et al. (2011) state that their research on lactose tolerance in India suggests that "the west Eurasian genetic contribution identified by Reich et al. (2009) principally reflects gene flow from Iran and the Middle East."^[25] Gallego Romero notes that Indians who are lactose-tolerant show a genetic pattern regarding this tolerance which is "characteristic of the common European mutation."^[26]

According to Romero, this suggests that "the most common lactose tolerance mutation made a two-way migration out of the Middle East less than 10,000 years ago. While the mutation spread across Europe, another explorer must have brought the mutation eastward to India – likely traveling along the coast of the Persian Gulf where other pockets of the same mutation have been found."^[26] They further note that "[t]he earliest evidence of cattle herding in south Asia comes from the Indus River Valley site of Mehrgarh and is dated to 7,000 YBP"^{[25][note 3]}



Map of Pakistan showing Mehrgarh in relation to the cities of Quetta, Kalat, and Sibi and the Kachi Plain of Balochistan.

Periods of occupation

Archaeologists divide the occupation at the site into eight periods.

Mehrgarh Period I (7000 BCE-5500 BCE)

The Mehrgarh Period I (7000 BCE-5500 BCE) was Neolithic and aceramic, without the use of pottery. The earliest farming in the area was developed by semi-nomadic people using plants such as wheat and barley and animals such as sheep, goats and cattle. The settlement was established with simple mud buildings and most of them had four internal subdivisions. Numerous burials have been found, many with elaborate goods such as baskets, stone and bone tools, beads, bangles, pendants and occasionally animal sacrifices, with more goods left with burials of males. Ornaments of sea shell, limestone, turquoise, lapis lazuli and sandstone have been found, along with simple figurines of women and animals. Sea shells from far sea shore and lapis lazuli found as far away as present-day Badakshan, Afghanistan shows good contact with those areas. A single groundstone axe was discovered in a burial, and several more were obtained from the surface. These ground stone axes are the earliest to come from a stratified context in South Asia. Periods I, II and III are contemporaneous with another site called Kili Gul Mohammed.

The aceramic Neolithic phase in the region is now called 'Kili Gul Muhammad phase', and it is dated 7000-5000 BC. Yet the Kili Gul Muhammad site, itself, may have started c. 5500 BC.^[28]

In 2001, archaeologists studying the remains of two men from Mehrgarh made the discovery that the people of the Indus Valley Civilization had knowledge of proto-dentistry from the early Harappan periods. In April 2006, it was announced in the scientific journal Nature that the oldest (and first *early Neolithic*) evidence for the drilling of human teeth *in vivo* (i.e. in a living person) was found in Mehrgarh. According to the authors, their discoveries point to a tradition of proto-dentistry in the early farming cultures of that region. "Here we describe eleven drilled molar crowns from nine adults discovered in a Neolithic graveyard in Pakistan that dates from 7,500 to 9,000 years ago. These findings provide evidence for a long tradition of a type of proto-dentistry in an early farming culture."^[29]

Mehrgarh Period II (5500 BCE–4800 BCE) and Period III (4800 BCE–3500 BCE)

The Mehrgarh Period II (5500 BCE–4800 BCE) and Merhgarh Period III (4800 BCE–3500 BCE) were ceramic Neolithic, using pottery, and later chalcolithic. Period II is at site MR4 and Period III is at MR2.^[2] Much evidence of manufacturing activity has been found and more advanced techniques were used. Glazed faience beads were produced and terracotta figurines became more detailed. Figurines of females were decorated with paint and had diverse hairstyles and ornaments. Two flexed burials were found in Period II with a red ochre cover on the body. The amount of burial goods decreased over time, becoming limited to ornaments and with more goods left with burials of females. The first button seals were produced from terracotta and bone and had geometric designs. Technologies included stone and copper drills, updraft kilns, large pit kilns and copper melting crucibles. There is further evidence of long-distance trade in Period II: important as an indication of this is the discovery of several beads of lapis lazuli, once again from Badakshan. Mehrgarh Periods II and III are also contemporaneous with an expansion of the settled populations of the borderlands at the western edge of South Asia, including the establishment of settlements like Rana Ghundai, Sheri Khan Tarakai, Sarai Kala, Jalilpur and Ghaligai!^[2]

Mehrgarh Periods IV, V and VI (3500 BCE-3000 BCE)



A figurine from Mehrgarh, similar to the Venus figurines

Period IV was 3500 to 3250 BCE. Period V from 3250 to 3000 BCE and period VI was around 3000 BCE.^[30] The site containing Periods IV to VII is designated as MR1!^[2]

Mehrgarh Period VII (2600 BCE-2000 BCE)

Somewhere between 2600 BCE and 2000 BCE, the city seems to have been largely abandoned in favor of the larger and fortified town Nausharo five miles away when the Indus Valley Civilization was in its middle stages of development. Historian Michael Wood suggests this took place around 2500

BCE.^[31]

Mehrgarh Period VIII

The last period is found at the Sibri cemetery about 8 kilometers from Mehgarh.^[2]

The Neolithic
↑ Mesolithic
Fertile Crescent Heavy Neolithic Shepherd Neolithic Trihedral Neolithic Pre-Pottery (A, B) Qaraoun culture Tahunian culture Yarmukian Culture Halaf culture Halaf-Ubaid Transitional period Ubaid culture Byblos Jericho Tell Aswad Çatalhöyük Jarmo Europe Arzachena culture Boian culture Butmir culture Cardium Pottery culture Cernavodă culture Cotofeni culture Cucuteni-Trypillian culture Dudești culture Gornești culture Gumelnița–Karanovo culture Hamangia culture Khirokitia Linear Pottery culture Malta Temples Ozieri culture Petrești culture Shulaveri-Shomu culture Sesklo culture Tisza culture

Lifestyle and technology

Early Mehrgarh residents lived in mud brick houses, stored their grain in granaries, fashioned tools with local copper ore, and lined their large basket containers with bitumen. They cultivated six-row barley, einkorn and emmer wheat, jujubes and dates, and herded sheep, goats and cattle. Residents of the later period (5500 BCE to 2600 BCE) put much effort into crafts, including flint knapping, tanning, bead production, and metal working.^[32] Mehrgarh is probably the earliest known center of agriculture in South Asia.^[33]

The oldest known example of the lost-wax technique comes from a 6,000-year-old wheel-shaped copper amulet found at Mehrgarh. The amulet was made from unalloyed copper, an unusual innovation that was later abandoned.^[34]

Artifacts

Human figurines

The oldest ceramic figurines in South Asia were found at Mehrgarh. They occur in all phases of the settlement and were prevalent even before pottery appears. The earliest figurines are quite simple and do not show intricate features. However, they grow in sophistication with time and by 4000 BC begin to show their characteristic hairstyles and typical prominent breasts. All the figurines up to this period were female. Male figurines appear only from period VII and gradually become more numerous. Many of the female figurines are holding babies, and were interpreted as depictions of the "mother goddess". However, due to some difficulties in conclusively identifying these figurines with the "mother goddess", some scholars prefer using the term "female figurines with likely cultic significance".^{[35][36][37]}

Pottery

Evidence of pottery begins from Period II. In period III, the finds become much more abundant as the potter's wheel is introduced, and they show more intricate designs and also animal motifs.^[2] The characteristic female figurines appear beginning in Period IV and the finds show more intricate designs and sophistication. Pipal leaf designs are used in decoration from Period VI.^[38] Some sophisticated firing techniques were used from Period VI and VII and an area reserved for the pottery industry has been found at mound MR1. However, by Period VIII, the quality and intricacy of designs seem to have suffered due to mass production, and due to a growing interest in bronze and copper vessels.^[30]

Burials

There are two types of burials in the Mehrgarh site. There were individual burials where a single individual was enclosed in narrow mud walls and collective burials with thin mud brick walls within which skeletons of six different individuals were discovered. The bodies in the collective burials were kept in a flexed position and were laid east to west. Child bones were found in large jars or urn burials (4000~3300 BCE).^[39]

Metallurgy

Metal finds have dated as early as Period IIB, with a few copper items.^{[2][38]}

Tiszapolgár culture
Usatovo culture
Varna culture
Vinča culture
Vučedol culture
Neolithic Transylvania
Neolithic Southeastern Europe

China

Peiligang culture
Pengtoushan culture
Beixin culture
Cishan culture
Dadiwan culture
Houli culture
Xinglongwa culture
Xinle culture
Zhaobaogou culture
Hemudu culture
Daxi culture
Majiabang culture
Yangshao culture
Hongshan culture
Dawenkou culture
Songze culture
Liangzhu culture
Majiayao culture
Qijialing culture
Longshan culture
Baodun culture
Shijiahe culture
Yueshi culture
Tibet

South Asia

Mehrgarh
Gufkaral
Burzoham
Chirand
Mundigak
Koldihwa
Brahmagiri

Neolithic Philippines

Jade culture

farming, animal husbandry
pottery, metallurgy, wheel
circular ditches, henges, megaliths
Neolithic religion

↓ Chalcolithic

Archaeological significance

Mehrgarh is now seen as a precursor to the Indus Valley Civilization. According to Ahmad Hasan Dani, professor emeritus of archaeology at Quaid-e-Azam University in Islamabad, "discoveries at Mehrgarh changed the entire concept of the Indus civilization [...] There we have the whole sequence, right from the beginning of settled village life."

See also

- Indus Valley Civilization and the list of Indus Valley Civilization sites
- List of inventions and discoveries of the Indus Valley Civilization
- Hydraulic engineering of the Indus Valley Civilization
- Bhirrana
- Mundigak — archaeological site in Kandahar Province
- Hadda — archaeological site in Nangarhar Province
- Surkh Kotal — archaeological site in Baghlan Province
- Mes Aynak — archaeological site in Logar Province
- Sheri Khan Tarakai — archaeological site in Bannu
- Mohenjo-daro — archaeological site in Sindh
- Harappa — archaeological site in Punjab
- Bolan Pass
- Nausharo
- Pirak
- Chanhudaro
- Quetta
- List of Stone Age art

Notes

1. According to Gangal et al. (2014), there is strong archeological and geographical evidence that neolithic farming spread from the Near East into north-west India.^{[6][7]} Gangal et al. (2014)^[6] "There are several lines of evidence that support the idea of connection between the Neolithic in the Near East and in the Indian subcontinent. The prehistoric site of Mehrgarh in Baluchistan (modern Pakistan) is the earliest Neolithic site in the north-west Indian subcontinent, dated as early as 8500 BCE.^[18]^[8]

Neolithic domesticated crops in Mehrgarh include more than 90% barley and a small amount of wheat. There is good evidence for the local domestication of barley and the zebu cattle at Mehrgarh ^[19], ^[20],^[10] but the wheat varieties are suggested to be of Near-Eastern origin, as the modern distribution of wild varieties of wheat is limited to Northern Levant and Southern Turkey ^[21].^[11] A detailed satellite map study of a few archaeological sites in the Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa regions also suggests similarities in early phases of farming with sites in Western Asia ^[22].^[12] Pottery prepared by sequential slab construction, circular fire pits filled with burnt pebbles, and large granaries are common to both Mehrgarh and many Mesopotamian sites ^[23].^[13] The postures of the skeletal remains in graves at Mehrgarh bear strong resemblance to those at Ali Kosh in the Zagros Mountains of southern Iran ^[19].^[9] Clay figurines found in Mehrgarh resemble those discovered at Teppe Zagheh on the Qazvin plain south of the Elburz range in Iran (the 7th millennium BCE) and Jeitun in Turkmenistan (the 6th millennium BCE) ^[2].^[14] Strong arguments have been made for the Near-Eastern origin of some domesticated plants and herd animals at Jeitun in Turkmenistan (pp. 225–227 in ^[25]).^[15]

The Near East is separated from the Indus Valley by the arid plateaus, ridges and deserts of Iran and Afghanistan, where rainfall agriculture is possible only in the foothills and cul-de-sac valleys ^[26].^[16] Nevertheless, this area was not an insurmountable obstacle for the dispersal of the Neolithic. The route south of the Caspian sea is a part of the Silk Road, some sections of which were in use from at least 3,000 BCE, connecting Badakhshan (north-eastern Afghanistan and south-eastern Tajikistan) with Western Asia, Egypt and India ^[27].^[17] Similarly, the section from Badakhshan to the Mesopotamian plains (the Great Khorasan Road) was apparently functioning by 4,000 BCE and numerous prehistoric sites are located along it, whose assemblages are dominated by the Cheshmeh-Ali (Tehran

- Plain) ceramic technology forms and designs^[26].^[16] Striking similarities in figurines and pottery styles, and mud-brick shapes, between widely separated early Neolithic sites in the Zagros Mountains of north-western Iran (Jarmo and Sarab), the Deh Luran Plain in southwestern Iran (Āppeh Ali Kosh and Chogha Sefid), Susiana (Chogha Bonut and Chogha Mish), the Iranian Central Plateau Tappeh-Sang-e Chakhmaq, and Turkmenistan (Jeitun) suggest a common incipient culture [28].^[18] The Neolithic dispersal across South Asia plausibly involved migration of the population ([29]^[19] and [25], pp. 231–233).^[15] This possibility is also supported by Y-chromosome and mtDNA analyses [30],^[20] [31].^[21]
2. Genetic research shows a complex pattern of human migrations.^[7] Kivisild et al. (1999) note that "a small fraction of the West Eurasian mtDNA lineages found in Indian populations can be ascribed to a relatively recent admixture.^[23] at ca. 9,300 ± 3,000 years before present,^[24] which coincides with "the arrival to India of cereals domesticated in the Fertile Crescent" and "lends credence to the suggested linguistic connection between the Elamite and Dravidic populations."^[24] Singh et al. (2016) investigated the distribution of J2a-M410 and J2b-M102 in South Asia, which "suggested a complex scenario that cannot be explained by a single wave of agricultural expansion from Near East to South Asia,"^[7] but also note that "regardless of the complexity of dispersal, NW region appears to be the corridor for entry of these haplogroups into India."^[7]
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Indus Valley Civilization

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