

Collapse or Transformation? : Beyond Environmental Determinism for the Indus Civilization

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Abstract

Did the Indus Civilization collapse? And if it did, what are the causes of the collapse? These are the questions we posed when we started our project on the Indus Civilization. To answer these questions, we tried to reconstruct the civilization using both natural and social sciences. We conducted a field research on environmental changes; i.e., coring at Rara Lake in Nepal for climate changes, OSL dating at Ghaggar River in India for river-dependent societies and etc., and archaeological excavations at two sites in India, Kanmer and Farmana. The collapse of a civilization is a big issue for both natural scientists and social scientists for a long time. It seems to me that natural scientists tend to emphasize the environmental factors for collapse while social scientists incline to focus on the social factors for collapse. Jared Diamond, in his book “Collapse”, suggested that the Indus civilization declined due perhaps to climate change, river shifts, and water management problems. This means that he insisted on the environmental factors for the case of Indus civilization.

The conclusion after our five years research on these issues, however, is that the case of Indus Civilization should be seen as a transformation due to some migration from Indus river basin to monsoon affected areas, rather than a sudden collapse due to some drastic natural or social events.

Keywords: Indus civilization, collapse, transformation, migration, monsoon