

*Indus Valley, c. 5,000 BC*  
*Size: 15.7 cm, and 12 cm*



The larger of the two is clearer about what it represents. The rearing serpent's head is the male sex. Below, on the curve, are the breasts of an adolescent girl, and the vaginal cleft opens along the back. The smaller stone may be a stylised version of the same, or it may be indicating potential sexuality; no breasts as yet, and an undeveloped serpent's head.

#### THE INDUS VALLEY

Excavations in the 1920s revealed ancient cities of vast proportions with architectural planning unparalleled in the ancient world, and a production of unique artefacts. The cities were raised on large platforms above the flood plain, and had wells, bathing rooms, drainage and granaries. These cities were different from those in Mesopotamia and Egypt; they had no palaces, no temples or walls. They seem to have evolved from local cultures that had roots extending back thousands of years to the earliest farming and pastoral communities. People decided how to organize their settlements, how to interact with other communities, how to resolve conflicts, what to do with surplus food and wealth, how to pass on knowledge from one generation to the next. These choices created its own particular framework. So far 1,500 settlements have been discovered over an area of 680,000 square kilometres. The building of these cities between 3500 and 2600 bc coincides with city-building in Mesopotamia and Egypt, and a millennium before something similar happened in China. The orientation of the Indus cities along cardinal directions reflects precise astronomical observations of the movements of the sun, stars and moon. In Mesopotamia, writing was invented c. 3300 bc to keep accounts and record trade. The Indus script came a few hundred years later, clearly not for accounting, but it remains inscrutable to this day in its frustratingly mute elegance.

#### MEHRGARH

This remarkable collection of terracotta figurines and other artefacts from the Indus Valley is unique in private hands, as far as we know, and ranks alongside the holdings of the museums of Islamabad and Karachi. On first acquaintance the figurines might seem simple, too naïve to hold the attention, but on closer inspection they become fascinating, because of the story they have to tell – like certain people encountered in life. A few only are illustrated and described here; a full listing, with dimensions and dates, is to be published separately.

The site of Mehrgarh, from where these figurines come, first came to light in 1920, and was excavated by the French Archaeological Mission under the direction of Jean-François Jarrige, from 1974 to 1986, and again from 1996 to 1997. By the Bolan river at the base of a major pass, the settlement of Mehrgarh dates back to 6500 bc; the figurines were produced in the first half of the 3rd millennium bc, when it was a mature settled community, cultivating grain and breeding animals.

Around 4000 bc, we emerged from the Neolithic period of our long evolution into the society of modern humanity, living together in large communities, establishing cities and developing the increasingly sophisticated infrastructure that was required. These precious relics are the witnesses of this transition, and are filled with meaning far beyond what their modest forms superficially exhibit, for those who are interested in what they transmit.

Learning how to use the special types of earth from the banks of the Indus River, the potters of Mehrgarh achieved a refined surface finish, which gave a thin silky skin to their wares. They also learned how to extract five colours from minerals. (The pottery of Susa at this time was noticeably less refined.) Three types of clay are attested so far: light red, grey, creamy brown. They are all represented in this collection, along with a wide variety of the designs typical of the Indus Valley civilization.