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A History of Pakistan

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Table of Contents

- **Introduction**
- **Chapter 1** Ancient Human Settlement: From the Soan Valley to Mehrgarh
- **Chapter 2** The Dawn of Urbanism: The Early Harappan Period
- **Chapter 3** The Indus Valley Civilization: Cities of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa
- **Chapter 4** Decline and Transformation: The Late Harappan Culture
- **Chapter 5** Arrival of the Indo-Aryans and the Vedic Age
- **Chapter 6** Gandhara: Crossroads of Cultures and Religions
- **Chapter 7** Persian, Greek, and Central Asian Rulers
- **Chapter 8** Buddhism and the Mauryan Influence
- **Chapter 9** Scythians, Parthians, and Kushanas
- **Chapter 10** Gupta and Post-Gupta Eras
- **Chapter 11** Early Spread of Islam: Muhammad bin Qasim and Sindh
- **Chapter 12** Ghaznavids and Ghurids: The Northern Frontier
- **Chapter 13** Delhi Sultanate and Regional Polities
- **Chapter 14** The Mughal Empire: Formation and Expansion
- **Chapter 15** Mughal Pakistan: Society, Culture, and Legacy
- **Chapter 16** Decline of the Mughals and Rise of Regional Powers
- **Chapter 17** The British Conquest and Colonial Rule
- **Chapter 18** Muslim Reformers and the Growth of Muslim Nationalism
- **Chapter 19** The Two-Nation Theory and Birth of the Muslim League
- **Chapter 20** The Pakistan Movement and the Road to Partition
- **Chapter 21** Independence and Partition: 1947
- **Chapter 22** Early Years: Refugees, Constitution, and Kashmir
- **Chapter 23** Political Instability and First Military Regime
- **Chapter 24** From Ayub Khan to Zia-ul-Haq: Military and Civilian Rule
- **Chapter 25** Democracy, Military Influence, and Contemporary Challenges

Introduction

The history of Pakistan is a saga woven from the threads of civilizations both ancient and modern, of mighty empires, conquests, and resilient cultures. The territory comprising modern-day Pakistan occupies a unique geographic position at the intersection of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Near East—a crossroads that has made it a perpetual corridor for the migration of peoples, ideas, and religions. Over millennia, this land has witnessed the rise and fall of some of the world's earliest and most sophisticated urban cultures, the spread of monumental religions and philosophies, and the growth of diverse and vibrant societies.

From prehistoric settlements in the Soan Valley and the early agrarian communities of Mehrgarh to the grandeur of the Indus Valley Civilization, this region has long stood at the forefront of human innovation and progress. The ancient cities of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa provide enduring testimony to the ingenuity, urban planning, and social organization of the Bronze Age. Successive waves of migrations and invasions—from Indo-Aryans and Persians to Greeks, Scythians, and Kushanas—brought with them new languages, beliefs, and ways of governing, transforming society while imbuing it with a syncretic character.

The arrival of Islam in the 8th century introduced new religious and cultural paradigms, which further shaped the region's historical trajectory. Over the centuries, Muslim dynasties and empires such as the Ghaznavids, Ghurids, and Mughals made profound contributions to the area's artistic, architectural, and administrative landscapes. With the decline of Mughal authority and the establishment of British colonial rule, the subcontinent entered yet another period of upheaval, marked by growing political awareness and the assertion of distinct Muslim identity.

The 20th century stands as a defining era in the history of Pakistan. The struggle for rights, representation, and self-determination among Muslims underlined the emergence of the two-nation theory, leading to unprecedented movements and eventually to the creation of a separate homeland: Pakistan. The events surrounding partition in 1947 unleashed not only hope and aspiration but also great turmoil, migration, and tragedy, effects of which reverberate in the national psyche to this day.

In the decades since independence, Pakistan has navigated myriad challenges—political instability, civil-military tensions, regional conflicts, and the quest for a coherent national identity. Its history since 1947 is marked by alternating periods of democracy and military rule, the legacy of conflict in Kashmir, war and secession in the east, ambitious development efforts, and complex interactions between faith, politics, and society. It is a story of resilience, struggle, and ongoing transformation on

the world stage.

This book endeavors to chart a comprehensive and balanced narrative of Pakistan's history, situating the present within the deep currents of its past. By tracing the region's journey from the dawn of human settlement to the problems and potentials of the present, this volume seeks to offer readers a lens through which to understand the multiple layers that constitute the history of Pakistan—and, perhaps, gain insight into its future possibilities.

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CHAPTER ONE: Ancient Human Settlement: From the Soan Valley to Mehrgarh

The land that would one day become Pakistan has a history stretching back far further than any national boundary. It's a story etched in stone tools, ancient hearths, and the very earth of river valleys and plains. Before the rise of great cities or the clash of empires, this region was home to some of the earliest human activity in South Asia, a place where our ancient ancestors roamed and eventually began the slow, transformative shift from a nomadic existence to settled life.

Imagine, if you will, a time more than two million years ago. In the Potohar Plateau of northern Pakistan, near modern-day Islamabad, flowed the Soan River. This valley, known as the Soan Valley, holds some of the earliest traces of human activity in the Greater Indus region. Here, stone tools have been discovered, simple yet profound artifacts that speak volumes about the early hominids who once inhabited this area. These tools, often made from quartzite pebbles and cobbles found in the river, are characteristic of what archaeologists call the Soanian culture.

The Soanian tools primarily consist of choppers, scrapers, and flakes – basic implements used for tasks like cutting, scraping hides, and shaping wood. While rudimentary by later standards, their presence indicates the early cognitive abilities and survival strategies of these ancient inhabitants. The Soan Valley is considered a key site for understanding early human activity in this part of the world. The sheer age of some of these finds, potentially dating back over two million years, makes the Soan Valley one of the oldest sites outside of Africa yielding evidence of early human presence.

This Paleolithic period, or Old Stone Age, was an immensely long era characterized by a hunter-gatherer lifestyle. Early humans in the Soan Valley, and likely other areas across what is now Pakistan such as the Rohri Hills in Sindh, lived in small groups, constantly moving in search of food and shelter. Their survival depended on their ability to craft tools from stone, understand their environment, and cooperate with one another. The Soan Valley, with its moderate climate and natural resources, would have provided a relatively favorable environment for these early populations.

Following the Paleolithic, the Mesolithic period emerged, a transitional phase marked by changes in climate and environment after the last ice age. While evidence from this period in Pakistan is less extensive than the Paleolithic or the subsequent Neolithic, it suggests a continuation of hunter-gatherer practices, possibly with more refined tools and a broader range of hunted and gathered resources. Sites in areas like Sindh and

the Peshawar Valley show evidence of flake tools and microliths, smaller and more specialized stone tools. The Mesolithic period eventually gave way to one of the most significant transformations in human history: the Neolithic Revolution.

Roughly around 8000 BCE, a profound shift began to take place in certain parts of the world, including the region that is now Pakistan. This was the dawn of the Neolithic period, the New Stone Age, characterized by the emergence of agriculture and the domestication of animals. This wasn't a sudden overnight change, but rather a gradual process that fundamentally altered human society, leading to settled communities and eventually, the rise of complex civilizations.

One of the most important archaeological sites illustrating this transition in South Asia is Mehrgarh, located on the Kacchi Plain of Balochistan, near the Bolan Pass. Discovered in 1974 by a French archaeological mission, Mehrgarh provides a remarkable window into early village life and the beginnings of agriculture in the region. Its history of occupation spans several millennia, from around 7000 BCE to 2600 BCE, showcasing a long period of development and change.

The earliest levels at Mehrgarh, dating back to between 7000 and 5500 BCE, reveal a small farming village. These early inhabitants were already cultivating crops like wheat and barley and domesticating animals such as sheep, goats, and cattle. The presence of six-row barley, a domesticated variety, suggests that agriculture was indeed being practiced here. While initially aceramic, meaning they didn't use pottery, they constructed buildings with unbaked mud bricks, some with multiple internal subdivisions. They also used bitumen to waterproof baskets, indicating a practical approach to daily life.

Life in early Mehrgarh wasn't just about farming and building houses. The burials found at the site offer fascinating insights into their beliefs and social practices. Individuals were buried, sometimes with elaborate grave goods, including baskets, stone and bone tools, beads, and pendants. The inclusion of these items suggests a belief in an afterlife and indicates a degree of social complexity, with some individuals perhaps holding higher status than others, as evidenced by the quantity and type of grave goods.

As Mehrgarh developed through subsequent periods, roughly from 5500 to 2600 BCE, we see further advancements. Pottery began to appear, initially simple and later adorned with more detailed decorations, including geometric patterns and human and animal figures. This marked the ceramic Neolithic and later, the Chalcolithic period, which saw the introduction of copper alongside stone tools. Evidence of metalworking, particularly copper, has been found in later levels.

The inhabitants of Mehrgarh became increasingly skilled in various crafts, including flint knapping, tanning, bead production, and metallurgy. The discovery of materials

like seashells, turquoise, and lapis lazuli at the site, which are not local to the area, indicates the existence of early trade networks. These networks connected Mehrgarh to distant regions, possibly as far as the coast and Central Asia, suggesting that even in these early periods, communities were not isolated but engaged in exchange of goods and ideas. The presence of lapis lazuli from Badakhshan, in modern-day Afghanistan, is a particularly strong indicator of long-distance trade.

Mehrgarh's architectural techniques also evolved. The mud-brick structures became more complex, with evidence of large compartmental buildings believed to be used for storage. While some interpretations suggest these structures weren't residential in the earliest phases, their construction speaks to an increasing level of organization and communal effort. The scale of the settlement grew, and by the later periods, Mehrgarh was a substantial village, laying the groundwork for more complex societal structures.

The significance of Mehrgarh cannot be overstated. It is considered one of the earliest known centers of agriculture in South Asia and provides crucial insights into the transition from a nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyle to settled agricultural communities. Its development demonstrates the ingenuity and adaptability of early human societies in the region, showcasing advancements in farming, animal domestication, technology, and trade that would be essential for the emergence of later, more complex civilizations. Mehrgarh, therefore, stands as a foundational site in the history of the land that would become Pakistan, a silent testament to the deep roots of human presence and innovation in this ancient land.

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