PART ONE

THE CONTEXT

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITIONS

SCOPE AND THEMES

South Asia, also known as the Indian Subcontinent, covers 4.5 million square kilometres and contains 109 of the world's mountains that rise over 7,000 metres (Figure 1.1). This region is home to one-third of the world's population and encompasses several hundred local languages and dialects and is the site of the emergence of four major world religions and one of the four Old World Civilisations. It now accounts for a massive US$ 1.854 trillion of the world's gross domestic product and is the source of a diaspora of some 30 million people. Given the economic and political significance of contemporary South Asia, it is no surprise that this vast geographical region has a matching richness within its archaeological and historical record. It is so vast and rich that it is correct to question whether it is even possible to present a volume which draws together such disparate topics as hunter–gathers from western India, the major urban forms of the Indus Civilisation, the Iron Age megaliths of Peninsular India and the imperial ideology of the Mauryans. We believe that this is possible but also believe that in order to do so, it is important to present this information through the medium of a major narrative theme in order to structure our material. Rather than just pursuing a route of describing site sequences and moving from one chronological building block to another, encyclopaedically detailing all the different cultures that have been identified across the region or focusing on technical descriptions of pottery or stone tools in an attempt to define archaeological cultures, we have chosen to take a site and regional-based themed approach structured within a distinct developmental framework.

Whilst fully conscious of the multiplicity of narratives, identities, approaches and paradigms present within contemporary South Asian archaeology, or rather archaeologies, our selected theme involves the direct comparison of South Asia's two largely urban-focused developments, generally termed the Indus or Harappan civilisation and the Early Historic or Indo-Gangetic civilisation. We will also undertake a detailed consideration of the people and

Figure 1.1. Map of South Asia showing modern nation states.

settlements belonging to the period between the two, which has frequently been presented and interpreted as a distinct cultural, political and social transformation. We have chosen to do this for two main reasons. The first is that there were many similarities in the internal sequences and cycles of both these developments and the time lapse between them has now been reduced to a matter of centuries. The second reason is that research now establishes clearly that the origins of both the Indus and the Early Historic urban-focused developments were much older and that both developed far more slowly than has often been presented in the past and, as such, have formed distinct traditions. Within this volume, we will also explore a range of different theories about state formation and social organisation in relation to South Asia, and then test them against a range of archaeological and, where appropriate, historical evidence. This process will serve to demonstrate how much our understanding

and perspectives have changed archaeological theory and fieldwork in South
Asia since Cambridge University Press's foundation publication of Raymond
and Bridget Allchin's *The Rise of Civilization in India and Pakistan* in 1982 in the
Cambridge World Archaeology series.

Whilst we will closely examine the dynamics of both of these urban-focused
populations in turn and consider issues such as continuity and transformation,
similarity and difference, it is also important to remember that few regions have
ever existed in a vacuum. South Asia has always influenced and been influ-
enced by its near neighbours and more distant trading partners. Recognising this
perspective is critical for understanding questions of diffusion and indigenous
development as these two fundamental issues of continuity and transformation
dominate discussions of archaeological explanation in South Asian archaeology.
By exploring the development, character and ultimate transformation of each
of the two main urban-focused sequences in depth, we will present a range of
past and current theoretical explanations. We will also demonstrate how these
have influenced the development of past and contemporary archaeological and
historical interpretations, which in turn have resulted in a number of endur-
ing social and political narratives. We would also stress that this volume is not
focused solely on urban forms or urbanism but on settlements and communities
more broadly and their networks and connections. Although, of course, chapters
and debates on the urban-focused development of the Indus and Early Historic
societies receive considerable coverage. As such, we believe that the title of the
volume reflects its contents, which consider the archaeologies of urban devel-
opment and their spheres of influence as well as non-urban communities and
non-urbanised regions and their populations between the Indus and Asoka.

Traditional synthetic archaeological studies of South Asia have tended to
either follow a chronological narrative introducing the main events and devel-
opments across the whole region, or present the developmental sequence of
either the Indus or the Early Historic civilisations. Whilst some of these gen-
eral chronological or synthetic narratives provide invaluable sources of evi-
dence, such as Settar and Korrisettar (2002) and Singh (2008), they remain
largely separate from theoretical concerns or explanations of change. Eltsov
has recently contributed to this cohort of scholarship with a volume exploring
concepts of the ancient South Asian city as gleaned from heavily edited textual
sources but remains largely urban-focused and controversial in his application
of later texts to the third millennium BCE (2008). Some of the works that
have explored either the Indus or the Early Historic urban and rural sequences
have provided innovative approaches for the analysis of those complex soci-
eties, for example Shaffer's (1992) concept of an 'Indus Valley Tradition' to
which we return later. However, most have focused on either one tradition
or the other, thus continuing the long-standing division between the Indus
and Early Historic, for example Wright (2010), Sengupta and Chakraborty

(2008), McIntosh (2002) and Kenoyer (1998). This division can be broadly traced back to the later years of European colonial influence in South Asia and the impact of individuals such as Mortimer Wheeler (1950), Gordon Childe (1934) and Stuart Piggott (1950) with their claims that a distinct cultural, linguistic and social transformation lay between the Indus Civilisation and the Early Historic. This is not to suggest that this was purely a colonial concept as a number of post-Independence South Asian scholars also adopted and adapted it, including Dani (1967), Banerjee (1965) and Lal (1955). Furthermore, some scholars have viewed the Indus through a prism influenced by the archaeology of Mesopotamia, such as Wright 2010. As this volume considers merchant populations within the Arabian Sea and Indo-Iranian Plateau, we also feel justified in citing relevant comparative models and concepts associated with those regions and beyond if they help us advance our understanding of the sequences and processes under discussion (Trigger 2003).

Archaeological research in South Asia has of course moved far beyond these simplistic models, but the influence that such early interpretations of key sites and materials had on the development of archaeological explanation has been immense, and one which we will explore, along with other archaeological discussions and theories throughout this volume. Although elements of continuity between the two periods have been recognised by an increasing number of scholars (e.g. Agrawal 2007; Upadhyay 2008; Eltsov 2008; Coningham 1995a; Shaffer 1993; Kenoyer 1991b; Chakrabarti 1999), the techniques, theories and methodologies for studying these two urban-focused developments have tended to remain separate – as indeed do most of the archaeologists working on them. Indeed, one recent comparative study of South Asian cities from 2500 BCE until after the ninth century CE has even stated that their configurations appear to have been quite separate: "The Indus, Early Historic and Medieval urban phases were independent developments" (Smith 2006a: 130). It is not the intention of this volume to lionise the contributions of colonial scholars but to join other scholars in acknowledging that their theoretical and methodological influences are still distinctly traceable (Basant 2008: 191); therefore addressing this artificial divide is one of the cornerstones of the present volume.

CHRONOLOGICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL SPAN

Bridget and Raymond Allchin presented three major synthetic texts to South Asian archaeologists; *The Birth of Indian Civilisation* (1968), which began with the Early Stone Age, continued through the Indus Civilisation and terminated with the Iron Age and what the Allchins called the beginnings of history. In parallel, *The Rise of Civilisation in India and Pakistan* (1982) began with a discussion of hunter-gathers and nomadic pastoralists, moved through early sedentary, agricultural populations to the main focus of the book, the Indus

Civilisation. Finally, Raymond Allchin's edited *The Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia* (1995a) revisited the transitional end of the Indus Civilisation, and then concentrated on the emergence and regional development of the second urban period, concluding with the Mauryan Empire. Sharing a similar title with Allchin's edited volume, Gautam Sengupta and Sharmi Chakraborty's book contains a number of contributors who question the usage and very definition of the term 'Early Historic' (2008). Dilip Chakrabarti's text *India: An Archaeological History: Palaeolithic Beginnings to Early Historic Foundations* (1999) primarily covered the archaeology of the modern state of India from the Palaeolithic to AD 300, and Upinder Singh's *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India,* up to the twelfth century AD (2008). Our own text falls between these approaches; we aim to be less wide ranging chronologically than Chakrabarti and Singh's volumes, which allows us to look in greater detail at sites and issues, and we draw together the two main urban-focused South Asian developments which formed the subject of separate Allchin volumes (Timeline 1.1).

The very term 'South Asian' as a description of people from the geographical region of South Asia is contested by some, and there is current debate surrounding the suitability of this term to describe people or groups of people who have originated from the countries of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and associated states, or are descended from citizens of these places. To many, 'South Asia' is considered a colonial construct, a blanket term that oversimplifies the geographical and cultural complexity of the region, and thus reduces the people so described to a uniform ethnicity. In place of 'South Asian', it has sometimes been proposed that people and groups of people are better referred to by their religion, such as Sikh, Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist. While there are clearly many issues with this (and other) suggested classificatory and descriptive system, the main point here is that many of the archaeological and cultural terms that we use within South Asia have been developed externally and may not always be appropriate. In many cases, it is important to realise that forcing the fit of such terms and names is not only inappropriate but may also have been a means of masking internal or indigenous activity. There are also a number of terms and related issues that are used commonly in South Asian archaeology, about which we need to make our own position and understanding clear. Notwithstanding these points, we will continue to use 'South Asia/n' as a geographically descriptive term, a form of shorthand, for the nation states outlined in Chapter 2. However, as we make clear in Chapter 2, this is not intended to mask differences, whether physical or cultural, as these differences are integral to our understanding of the prehistory and early history in this region. Rather, it is intended as an overview term, which we feel is relatively free from ethnic, religious or other content whilst reflecting the strong cultural and historical connections of this region and distinguishing it from West and South East Asia.
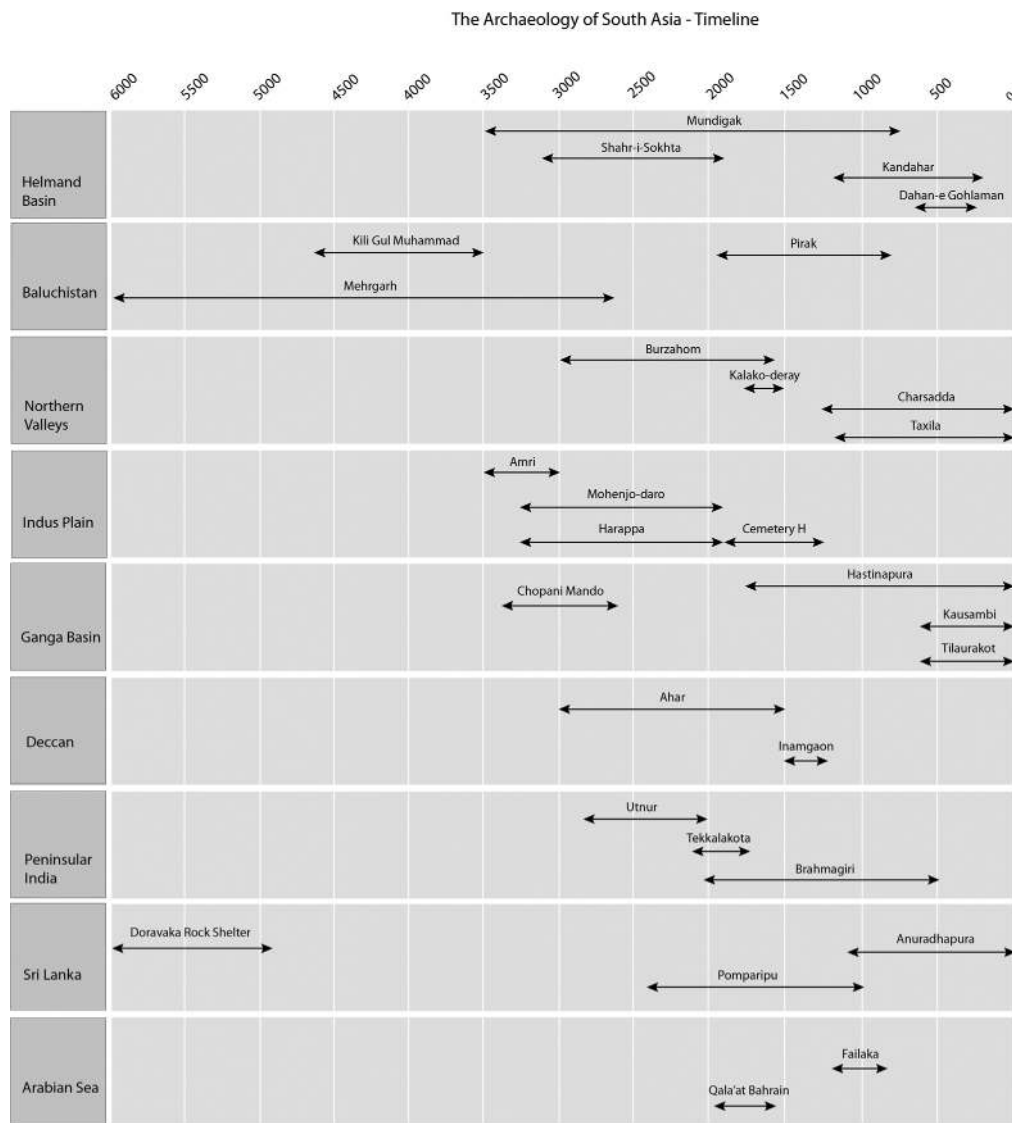
Timeline 1.1. General timeline for the Indus Valley and Early Historic Traditions.

South Asia today is a highly complex region with multiple religions, ideolo-
gies and belief systems, languages, ethnic groups and social identities, and this
was also true in the past. As a result, we cannot offer a 'one size fits all' approach
to understanding the past here because very different processes were run-
ning at the same time in different parts of the region. For example, when the
first iron-using farmers sailed from Peninsula India to Sri Lanka they appear
to have coexisted for a while alongside lithic tool–using hunter–gatherering
populations, apparently bypassing Neolithic and copper artefact–using phases.
Rather than starting this volume by presenting the earliest evidence for
human activity within South Asia, and moving chronologically through each

region, we will draw out core themes and processes and follow a comparative approach. For this reason, rather than beginning with early communities of hunter-gatherer-foragers, we will begin by considering South Asia's first food producers and analysing their material culture, in order to both understand change and organisation within these populations, and to present them as the roots of increasing complexity and incipient urbanism. We are also aware of the great contrasts between available data sets, primarily chronometric dates ranges and published sites, across South Asia. While it is clear that there are foci of excellence, such as the pioneering work of Siran Deraniyagala (1992) exploring microlithic tool-using populations within the tropical rainforests of central Sri Lanka, comparative perspectives from elsewhere are not yet available. Until such data are more systematically investigated and approached across South Asia as a whole, it is unlikely to be systematically synthesised and presented. This situation is changing, as seen in publications such as those of Robin Dennell (2009), Sheila Mishra (1995; Mishra et al. 2013) and Ravi Korisettar and Mike Petraglia's teams in the Deccan (1999), so we may anticipate a greater degree of knowledge and information in the near future.

Similarly, the decision about where to finish the narratives within this volume was as difficult as determining the starting point, and we debated whether we should end with the opening of the Gupta 'Golden Age' or the era of Kanishka or possibly even as early as the movement of the Macedonians into the far west of the South Asian region. However, we have chosen to end it with the reign of Asoka (r. 269–232 BCE), the great Mauryan Emperor who had details of his life and ideology recorded in a variety of sources, including primary historical texts, and inscribed stone pillars and boulders. We have chosen this point to finish as we suggest that the Mauryan Empire brought together for the first time much of South Asia under a single hegemony, one which formed the basis of the state traditions which held sway for the next two millennia. Modern South Asia draws heavily on the time period covered in this book for many of its economic, social and cultural narratives, and these issues of identity and recognition will be discussed in our next chapters, where we consider the role of archaeology, identity and nationalism within the modern nation states of South Asia.

Given the great range of people and cultural markers within a single country such as India, Nepal or Sri Lanka, it is reasonable to ask how we consider it possible to explore the prehistory and early history of a number of countries over a six thousand year timescale. We argue that it is precisely because of this time depth that we can consider the countries of South Asia as a larger entity existing beyond modern geopolitical boundaries. By exploring the development of the two major urban-focused traditions in this region, we are able to examine both similarities and differences across a wide range of environmental, social, ideological and cultural groupings. In Chapter 2, we will discuss the geographic boundaries which both unite and define the modern states of

South Asia, and we will also situate the study region within its wider setting of the Indian Ocean and the Himalayan and Hindu Kush mountain barriers. In so doing, we will ensure that modern geo-political boundaries do not artificially constrain our discussion.

Whilst there are a number of convincing geographical and cultural elements that make this region a coherent whole for the purposes of long-term study, there are of course many links with regions outside the immediate boundaries of study that can be elucidated through archaeological analysis. Historical and art historical sources inform us about contact with the Classical Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Near East, Eurasia and, of course, Achaemenid Persia to the west. Indeed, we have accounts of Megasthenes, the Seleucid Ambassador to the Mauryan court, and the later records of the Chinese Buddhist pilgrims with records of contact with China and Central Asia, as well as South East Asia. However, in order to understand the nature and dynamics of such contact in earlier periods, we need to turn to archaeology, and we will explore these contacts in greater depth in relevant sections. For example, we will examine the evidence for the reported presence of Indus merchants and entrepots in Mesopotamia, northern Afghanistan and along the Persian Gulf, along with evidence from Indus sites in South Asia indicating external contact in Chapter 7. The impact of South Asia itself on surrounding regions is also important, not only with respect to trade and exchange, but also in the spread of ideologies such as Hinduism and Buddhism to various parts of South-east and Central Asia. In turn, pilgrims from these areas to South Asia have also had impact on developments in the region (e.g. Bellina and Glover 2004; Indrawooth 2004).

KEY CONCEPTS AND THEIR ARCHAEOLOGICAL INDICATORS

There are many concepts in modern archaeology which are frequently used, although different scholars may attach somewhat different understandings as to their exact meanings and applications. For example, differing definitions of urbanism in South Asia have hindered comparisons between the Indus and Early Historic Traditions and, as a result, we believe that it is important to provide definitive explanations of potentially controversial terms and concepts from the outset. This section will therefore present and consider a wide range of different archaeological concepts relevant to our broader discussions, and offer definitions or outlines which will be of value to readers as well as helping to ensure that misunderstandings and misinterpretations do not arise. We will also draw on the definitions presented here to underpin current understanding (and misunderstandings) of the main chronological and cultural events within the region.

Many of the following terms and concepts are closely linked, and there is often a degree of overlap between definitions, but they are all part of our search for greater understanding of the origins of urban-focused communities

and their populations. We have also explicitly engaged with the concept and definition of 'civilisation' as it is frequently identified as one of the fundamental questions to be addressed by archaeology (Gamble 2001: 157), albeit one of the most debated and contested. Just as important as understanding the origins of any archaeological phenomenon, is an understanding of the dynamics and processes which carried that phenomenon forward giving rise to tangible evidence which we as archaeologists have recovered in the present. Indeed, understanding and explaining issues of cultural resilience and stability may also shed light on differing trajectories of adaptation.

Differentiation and Social Inequality

Exploring and recognising the advent and development of inequality within a cultural sequence is one of the fundamental questions and challenges that concerns archaeologists and ancient historians (Price and Feinman 2010). Concepts of differentiation and social inequality are closely tied to the emergence of social and economic complexity itself, making it important to understand what we mean by these terms and processes. Traditionally, many archaeologists accepted a definition of a 'simple' society as one with few formal layers of decision-making, whether these represent hierarchies of power or social and economic organisation (e.g. Renfrew and Bahn 2010; Stein 1994). For example, a group which belongs to the social anthropology category of 'band' is frequently defined as having a small number of members, fewer than 100; with an egalitarian approach to power, decision making and leadership; a subsistence strategy based on mobility with little, if any, emphasis on storage or the production of surplus (Service 1971). In direct contrast with this category, a complex society is traditionally referred to as a state or civilisation and is frequently defined through its possession of a large population, often greater than 20,000 individuals; a clear hierarchy with many social classes or groupings; the production and redistribution of agricultural surplus which allows the maintenance of a large section of the population who are not engaged in food production; the presence of a centralised bureaucracy; the emergence of a shared religious ideology; and the creation of differentiated groups of specialised craft-workers (Childe 1950; Trigger 2003). We are also aware that such terms, including chiefdoms, are continually interrogated, developed and redeveloped (Earle 1991; Stein and Rothman 1994). Indeed, some scholars strongly question the uncritical usefulness of such categories, particularly band and chiefdom, and stress that we must acknowledge that even 'archaic' states followed extremely different trajectories (Yoffee 2005). We must stress, however, that we wish to avoid the judgements which are frequently associated with the use of the terms 'simple' and 'complex' or 'core' and 'periphery', and that we are not judging lifeways in terms of sophistication and adaptation, or pursuing Eurocentric or Orientalist dichotomies of value. However, we do recognise