

INTRODUCTION

BEADS IN THE BACKYARD

Jamil Bhatti, a school teacher in Shorkot, Pakistan, sits behind part of his collection of pottery and beads. Mr. Bhatti hopes to open a museum to display the treasures he has found.



Ever since he was a little boy, Jamil Bhatti has enjoyed poking around abandoned lots in the mound on which his city is built. He finds the same kinds of things found in abandoned lots all over the world: broken jars, a scrap of writing, a game piece, a lost earring. Sometimes, if he's lucky, he finds a coin or two.

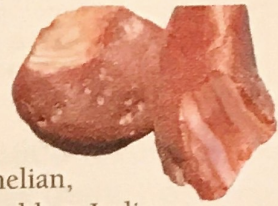
But the things that Mr. Bhatti finds are older than things most people find lying around their backyards—a lot older. Mr. Bhatti lives in Shorkot, a small city in Pakistan. Some of the backyards in Shorkot have been collecting odds and ends for thousands of years.

When Mr. Bhatti finds something interesting, he brings it home. The children in his neighborhood know that he is interested in old things, and whenever they find some old coins or beads they bring those to him, too. His living room is full of shelves cluttered with pottery and broken figurines—and beads. Lots and lots of beads.

Mr. Bhatti knows what these objects feel and smell like, and the taste they leave on his hands. He knows every inch of the places where they lay buried for so many years, the way the countryside first bakes under the sun, then drowns in the summer rains, and is finally scoured by the freezing winter winds. But sometimes he would like to know more. So he has made a point of getting to know archaeologists

who sometimes visit his city. Mr. Bhatti shows the archaeologists the things he has found, and together they talk about what these objects might be, when they were made, and who might have made them.

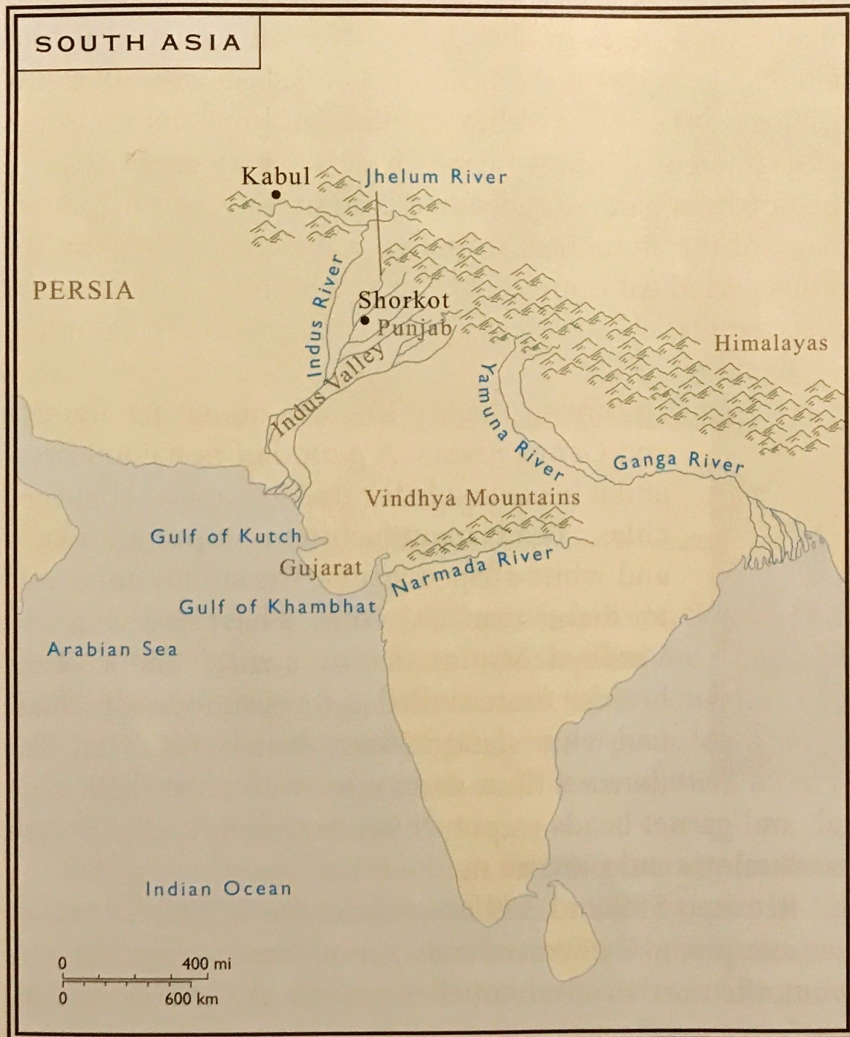
Archaeologists estimate that Mr. Bhatti's oldest beads were made more than 4,000 years ago, during the time of the Indus Valley civilization. South Asia's first towns and cities grew up during this civilization, which lasted from about 2600 to 1900 BCE. These beads are made of carnelian, a red-orange stone, and lapis lazuli, a bright blue stone. And yet, there are no carnelian or lapis lazuli mines near Shorkot. Carnelian comes from Gujarat, a region of India near the Arabian Sea, 500 miles to the southwest. Lapis



“ Carnelian, Khambhat, India, 30,000,000 years ago



“ Lapis lazuli bead, Shorkot, Pakistan, 600–300 BCE



lazuli comes from the mountains of Northern Afghanistan, 500 miles to the northwest. How did they get to Shorkot?

Traders brought the beads in their packs, carried by foot or camel or boat between the cities of South Asia. Of course these merchants traded more than the precious stones and metals that were sometimes made into beads; grain, wool, and animals were probably the most common goods for sale. Over the thousands of years between then and now, the grain, wool, and animal remains have rotted away, but the polished stone and metal of the beads are still nearly as bright and beautiful as on the day they were made.

Sometime around 1500 BCE, traders stopped traveling through the Punjab (the area of northwestern India and Pakistan surrounding the Indus River). Its cities became smaller or were even abandoned. No one knows why this happened. What we do know is that shortly after the decline of the Indus Valley civilization, new communities with different cultures began to develop in settlements in the northern parts of the **subcontinent**. During this period, many of the stone beads popular as ornaments during the Indus period continued to be made and used, but black and deep red glass beads created in fire became more common.

By about 600 BCE, new cities sprang up in the Punjab and to the east to the area along the Yamuna and Ganga Rivers. A period of peace followed, and it became safe for traders to travel between cities. Bead manufacturers imported black-and-white-striped agates, the stones once used to make marbles, from as far away as the Vindhya Mountains in central India. They became more skilled and began to brush black-and-white designs onto their beads. They also donated them to monks, who used shell, crystal, and garnet beads as prayer beads to help them in their meditations and prayers.

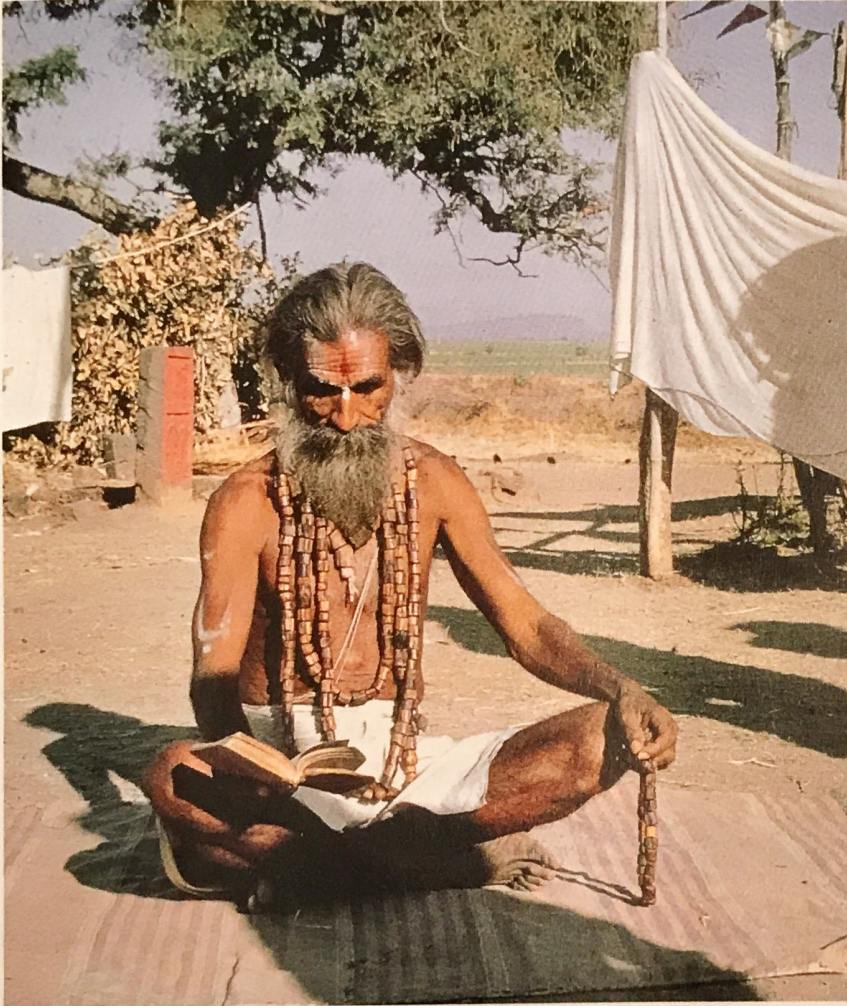
Between 558 and 529 BCE, Cyrus the Great of Persia (a large empire to the west of India) conquered parts of Afghanistan, the northern Indus Valley and the Punjab. He and his successors collected tribute, a heavy yearly tax, and sent

sub = “below” in Latin. South Asia lies below the continent of Asia and is divided from the rest of Asia by the Himalayas.

“ Stone and glass beads, Bawani, Pakistan, 600–300 BCE



“ Painted carnelian and agate beads, Shorkot, Pakistan, 600–300 BCE



South Asian monks often use prayer beads to help them meditate and pray. Each bead can represent a prayer or name of a god. They also collect beads from the sacred pilgrimage places and make them into necklaces.

officials as well as troops to defend their forts. Some of the multicolored glass beads found at Shorkot are similar to multicolored beads from Greece and other countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. They were probably brought to South Asia by Persian traders and Greek soldiers hired to fight for the Persians in the Punjab.

When the heroic Macedonian Greek general Alexander the Great and his armies defeated the Persian Empire in 326 BCE, they took over Persian territories in Afghanistan and northwest Pakistan. During their return to Greece, Alexander and his men traveled through the Punjab to the Indus River

BEADED HISTORY

2600–1900 BCE

Heavy trading of stone and metal beads, grain, wool, and animals within South Asia

About 1500–800 BCE

Growth of new communities in north; black and deep red glass beads created in fire become common

600–500 BCE

Painted carnelian beads and prayer beads become common

550–326 BCE

Mediterranean glass beads arrive from the west

550 BCE to 200 CE

Crystal and amethyst beads traded to Greeks and Romans

and probably passed right by Shorkot. Fragments of Greek-style figurines and coins may indicate that some of Alexander's soldiers settled at the site.

By 200 CE, Indian trade networks extended from the Roman Empire to the west, Tibet and China to the north and east, Burma, Thailand, and Southeast Asia to the east and southeast, and Arabia and West Africa to the southwest. Not surprisingly, the beads with white designs from this period in Shorkot turn up not only in the Punjab, but for the first time can be found in all parts of the South Asian subcontinent, as well as China and Southeast Asia.

As Mr. Bhatti gently runs his fingers across his strings of beads, he is touching thousands of years of South Asia's history. From the lapis lazuli and carnelian the people of the Indus Valley imported, to the glass beads and prayer beads of the northern communities and the multicolored glass beads and coins of the Greeks and Persians, his beads tell the story of a rich, complicated, colorful history that happened right in his own backyard. Someday, Mr. Bhatti hopes to establish a museum to share the wonderful history of the city he loves.



A VERY OLD COLLECTION

Archaeologists found a small terracotta pot on the floor of a room that was used for cooking. The pot was filled with dirt, but as the archaeologists began to probe the surface with a pointed piece of bamboo, they dislodged a carnelian bead. Every night for three months, one of the archaeologists carefully excavated the pot, stopping to investigate each new bead. The team members had a contest to see if anyone could guess how many beads were in the pot, but no one was even close.

They finally discovered 133 beads and fragments of stone and copper. The larger beads were on the top and lots of tiny beads were at the very bottom. The beads are all different ages and were probably collected from eroding areas of the site by a child over 3,700 years ago, just like Mr. Bhatti and the children in his neighborhood collect things today.