

methodologies of field enquiries' as lying locked in our pre-colonial texts. Rather, to my mind, it is the hegemony of history over archaeology in most academic institutions in India that has stifled the growth of the latter. If at all there is any hope in translating this vision into a reality, then this is a task that perhaps can only be entrusted to new archaeology centres located within universities in India sometime in the future.

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Shereen Ratnagar, *Harappan Archaeology: Early State Perspectives*, Primus Books, Delhi, 2016, 326 pp., ₹2195.

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The long archaeological scholarship of the Bronze Age Harappan (or Indus) Civilization (c. 2600 BCE–1800 BCE) provides a view of shifting disciplinary trends within South Asian archaeology. One can trace the moves away from overarching diffusionary approaches and 'rise and fall' of archaeological cultures to experiment with the application of new theoretical turns within archaeology, which have largely been fashioned by archaeological research in Western Europe and North America. One can also trace the adoption of sophisticated methods of archaeological sciences, which reveal many details and minutiae that were once deemed irretrievable by earlier generations of archaeologists. Yet, the above advances have failed to eradicate the positivist archaeology of South Asia, which breeds fundamentalisms of many kinds, especially of scientificism and nationalism. Thus, the scientific scholarship of the Harappan Civilization is also being increasingly used for establishing truisms of national heritage and partisan and identity politics. Therefore, the need for a critical and self-reflective praxis that is able to interrogate notions of evidence, constructs of archaeological knowledge and issues of ethics is urgent for the 'well-being' of this archaeology. Shereen Ratnagar's analytical and detailed review of Harappan archaeology through the interpretive lens of 'Early State Perspectives' is a reminder, along with a very small body of archaeological research, that the scholarship of archaeology allows rich insights into epistemic realms provided, to quote the author, we undertake 'an exercise in archaeological interpretation'.¹

Ratnagar encourages her readers to keep in mind the analogical methods of knowledge-making which provide reasons for disengaging with the fundamentalism of demonstrable truths. For example, she draws upon the 'necessary connection between state and urbanism' to create focus upon the need to understand the nature of analytical truths, which demand, as she emphasizes, critical enquiries into 'the long history of thought in the making of this analytical connection'.²

¹ Shereen Ratnagar, *Harappan Archaeology: Early State Perspectives* (Delhi: Primus Books, 2016), 1.

² *Ibid.*, 70.

Historiography, therefore, also looms large in her discussions, and her aims are ‘to put the pieces together and to conceive of the entirety of Harappan archaeological remains in terms of a mode of cultural organisation, a kind of society, and a set of economic patterns, thereby putting some flesh on the bones’. She is circumspect about the possibilities of her objectives and judiciously observes that ‘only tentative beginnings involving some aspects of the whole can possibly be suggested to review, accept or argue about and reject—which is the only way that a coherent review of this ancient civilization can be built up’.³

Through twelve chapters with disparate themes that relate to issues of historiography, theory, topography and legacy, Ratnagar builds up a profile of the Harappan state, and substantiates her earlier research on *Enquiries into the Political Organisation of Harappan Society* (1991) and *The End of the Great Harappan Tradition* (2000). She astutely explains her inferences for demonstrating the flaws in the ways in which social, economic and environmental histories of the Harappan Civilization are established by archaeologists. In this undertaking, she also uses the analogical method for deconstructing existing theories of the ‘Harappa Culture’, such as the kinds of possible commands over technologies of production, the degree and implications of specializations in the crafts, notions of standardization, uses of architectural forms and select ‘type artefacts’, and geography and environment, including the implications of the meeting of sweet and salt water.

Through her earlier research, Ratnagar had shown that the political system of statehood possibly provided the Harappan Civilization its distinctive cultural form. In this book, she develops a novel argument, namely, that changes within the state structure might have led to the Civilization’s dissolution. She foregrounds the agency of the inhabitants, which is usually neglected within the archaeological histories of the phenomenon. Thus, she achieves the task she sets out to undertake through the book, that is of documenting the ‘human angle: the social groups who lived in the house blocks of Mohenjodaro, the political imperatives behind the distribution of chert blades, the advantages of an enormous aquifer and of lift irrigation on the Indus plain and so on’.⁴ But perhaps more importantly, through the undertaking she demolishes some of the so-called prime evidence of the Harappan cultural legacy, which have lent to creations of archaeological facts about the deep antiquity of the Ancient Indian, or to be politically correct, South Asian, Civilization since the 1950s.

The book comprises five sections. The first is a long chapter on ‘The Harappan Civilization and its “World”’, wherein Ratnagar describes the remarkably different landscape of the Harappan geography from what we see today. She reminds us through the map that precedes the chapter that the Rann of Kutch, Little Rann, Gulf of Kutch and Nal depression were seminal waterscapes, which provided routes into the Arabian Sea, and thus facilitated connections and exchange. She presents a case for the high cultural status of the buffalo within the Harappan

³ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

societies, which she deems was ‘unparalleled in later periods’.⁵ The next three chapters in the section ‘Historiography’ inform us of the many instances of presentism within the existing scholarship on the nature of Harappan society. One of the chapters is aptly titled ‘A Past to Mirror Ourselves’. In analysing why certain kinds of evidence is usually sought and disseminated by archaeologists who study the Harappan Civilization, Ratnagar brings to fore the political demands of urban economies, which she believes was the ‘radical change’ that led to the establishment of a state.⁶ She documents the importance of finding evidence of the use of force and warfare within the state formation processes, and illustrates the fallacy of presuming the presence of caste system and untouchability within the social fabric of the Civilization.

Through the chapters, Ratnagar interrogates the impositions of preconceived notions about Ancient South Asia upon the Bronze Age Civilization, and illuminates, if not explicitly, the continuation of colonial historiography of a caste-ridden, ritually and traditionally bound, civilizational heritage. The exposure is no doubt of great importance, although she—frustratingly for this reader—disengages with the contributions of a few notable archaeologists who have furthered the above historiography in recent decades.

One, for example, is Walter Fairservis Jr., who concluded that the Harappan Civilization could not be a state, and drew upon the then known ‘cultural assemblage’ of the Civilization for locating ‘the roots of Ancient India’ (also the title of his publication in 1971). He had stated explicitly that the ‘story of prehistoric India [...] stretches back to a time so remote that it conforms to a Hindu *Kalpa* of untold generations reaching to a primordial world [...]’.⁷ In discussions of the ‘excursus for the case of state’,⁸ which are to be found throughout the book, Ratnagar has analyzed at some length the views of Gregory Possehl, who had also denied the possibilities of a Harappan state. The latter had, however, echoed the opinions of Fairservis, who was his mentor and supervisor. Ratnagar’s other omission is Jim Shaffer, who brought into Harappan studies the application of the archaeological construct of Culture Tradition (1978), and who, with his co-author Dianne Lichtenstein, has subsequently refashioned and modified the above processualist construct for ‘linking specific prehistoric social entities in South Asia into one cultural tradition [...] over a time period from the development of food production in the seventh millennium to the present [...]’.⁹ Shaffer’s and Lichtenstein’s modified construct of Cultural Tradition has been further modified by Jonathan Mark Kenoyer since the 1990s for mapping equivalence between traditions of craft specialization and traditions of kinship and caste. Ratnagar has carefully deconstructed Kenoyer’s models.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁷ Walter Fairservis Jr., *The Roots of Ancient India* (New York, NY: Macmillan Company, 1971), 381.

⁸ Ratnagar, *Harappan Archaeology*, 69–70.

⁹ Jim G. Shaffer and Diane A. Lichtenstein, ‘South Asian Archaeology and the Myth of Indo-Aryan Invasions’, in *The Indo-Aryan Controversy: Evidence and Inference in Indian History*, ed. Edwin F. Bryant and Laurie L. Patton (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), 93.

One of the strengths of the book is the demonstration of the value of comparative studies. Ratnagar throws into sharp relief, especially through the section on 'Matters of State', the increasing trend among archaeologists of South Asia, both native and foreign, of historicizing the uniqueness of the Harappan Civilization by ignoring its connected histories. She draws upon the extensive scholarship of the archaeology of Ancient Mesopotamia and ethnographies of 'tribal' societies, prominently the Yoruba, to show the possible manifestations of early state societies within the Bronze Age. She also suggests that citadel sites such as Harappa and Mohenjodaro were 'statements of power in a society without long-established priesthoods and permanent cultic institutions that handled redistribution, craft production, and conflict resolution', and they 'constituted nodes in a "mesh"'. She is of the opinion that the disintegration of the Harappan system ought to be located in the 'plethora of the "gap"' within the 'mesh' and illustrates the value of the comparative methodology which, for her, reveals that 'like Harappan settlements many towns of the Upper Country [in third-millennium Mesopotamia] were deserted when the state that gave them a new personality collapsed'.¹⁰

In the penultimate section on 'Waterscapes', Ratnagar brings to bear her prodigious scholarship of the 'Harappan overseas trade' and management of water, water resources and urban sanitation to field questions on the degree and visibility of state control. She provides strong analogical evidence of an inchoate but intensely pervasive state, an example of which is her study of Dholavira, where the vast 'number of cubical weights' and 'major intervention in the husbanding of flood water [...] would surely have been a true achievement of management'.¹¹ In the final section on 'Dissolution', she sifts through the vast literature on the 'decline' and ostensible cultural legacy of the Harappan Civilization. She also highlights the need for interrogating the creations of archaeological sequences because, as she says, 'changes in the material equipment of everyday life' and 'vertical sequences of artefact-types are [often] read at face value without reference to their meanings, functions, or technological inputs. Thus, potters' marks "evolve" into writing, the amulet into the seal'.¹²

A truly novel element of Ratnagar's research is the agency of the pastoral groups within the make-up of the Harappan state that she brings to fore. The map depicting 'the region settled by the Harappans', with which the book begins, shows the dominant pastoral topography within the Harappan settlement pattern. It encourages us to intellectually regard Ratnagar's ruminations with which she ends the book, namely, that

some powerful groups (erstwhile pastoralists?) with organizational ability could have asserted their dominance at strategic points across the vast region, transplanting many aspects of their lifestyles and social institutions. So there may never have been a con-

¹⁰ Ratnagar, *Harappan Archaeology*, 155–56.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 254.

¹² *Ibid.*, 229.

tinuously settled, uniformly controlled, or entirely acculturated territory from Harappa to Lothal between 2600 and 1800 BC.¹³

The positioning of the pastoralists as political players in the changing constitution of the Harappan state enhances the relevance of her research for histories of pre-colonial South Asia, where such groups are rarely recalled despite their visible archaeological presence.

The Harappan state, Ratnagar declares, was neither built upon conditions of surplus nor redistribution. Her thesis of its amorphous yet palpable presence shows us reasons for interrogating the wisdom of mapping long-lasting cultural legacies of Bronze Age societies. Additionally, her conception of the many requirements of such a state, including the command of a large labour force, and its shifting form through time, reveal to us the rich possibilities of archaeological knowledge, adding to the immense pedagogic value of the book.

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Upinder Singh, *The Idea of Ancient India: Essays on Religion, Politics and Archaeology*, SAGE Publications, New Delhi, 2016, xlii + 436 pp., ₹1250.

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Upinder Singh, in her introduction to *The Idea of Ancient India*, makes it clear that the book offers new and refreshing ways of looking at ancient Indian history, by stating her preference for the adjective ‘ancient’ over ‘early’ when periodizing the field of her interest, ‘mainly for aesthetic reasons’. This is a field with which Singh has engaged over decades as a teacher and researcher, and the book seems to be the culmination of this long, colourful journey. Most of the 13 essays collected in the volume have been published before in some form or other. Together, they not only represent the progress, development and shifts in Singh’s career as a historian, but also present her unique location in her field, with her sharp methodological, ideological and historiographical interventions.

The book is divided into four parts for both thematic and methodological reasons. Singh’s attention is on four different kinds of primary sources. The four essays in the first part, ‘Religion and Region’, deal with religious history, focussing on certain regions, with an intensive empirical study of epigraphic data. The second part, ‘Archaeologists and the Modern Histories of Ancient Sites’, contains four essays charting out how modern politics, both colonial and post-independence, often shaped the fate of ancient sites and the field of archaeology; she demonstrates this primarily through archival records. The three essays in ‘The Intersections of Political Ideas and Practice’ are surveys of ancient Indian political ideology, with supreme attention paid to textual material (including inscriptions). Finally, ‘Looking

¹³ *Ibid.*, 255.