

Rita Wright,

*The Ancient Indus – Urbanism, Economy and Society*

The Indus civilization was erased from human memory until 1924, when it was rediscovered and announced in the *Illustrated London News*. A contemporary of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, early archaeologists, such as Gordon Childe, viewed the Indus as among the world's first major civilizations. His views went out of favour among Indus scholars who later emphasized the culture's unique (enigmatic) past. Utilizing a comparative framework, in which she draws on studies of other early states, Rita Wright restores the Indus to its rightful place in the study of early civilizations. The book is rich in its detail of archaeological evidence. Through an analysis of the rich material culture left behind by the Indus people, she addresses such topics as the instability of the climate to which Indus populations responded, the beginning of agriculture, the establishment of trade networks with distant lands, and the diversified and specialized agro-pastoral and craft producing economy that has left its legacy in South Asia even in the present. She also goes into detail on the cultural construction of space, memory and Indus religious ideologies. Drawing on her own excavations, surveys, and research on urbanism at the ancient city of Harappa and its surrounding countryside, as well as her field research in Iran and Afghanistan, she emphasizes the interconnected nature of early societies by focusing on the period's social networks between city and rural communities; farmers, pastoralists, and craft producers; and Indus merchants and traders.

As she notes, if Egypt was the gift of the Nile, then the gift of the Indus was its unique resources with rich setting that were brought together into an integrated society. With its core situated among rich alluvial plains and ecologically diverse zones, Indus farmers, pastoralists, artisans and merchants developed and sustained a complex economy. To the north, west and east were mountains and deserts from which the people of the Indus drew an abundance of raw materials, fashioned elaborate crafts and created a complex administrative technology based on system of standardized weights and inscribed devices. These were used to good effect in establishing political and social networks that enhanced the civilization's integration. To the south were the oceans, seas, and port locations that promoted active trading with contemporary complex societies that grew and flourished throughout the greater Near East. In this way, the Indus established itself as an important player on the world stage, which brought them into contact with cultures bearing different ideas and ways of life that cross-fertilized with their own.

Dr. Wright offers a new view of the Indus civilization and is a major contribution to Indus studies and the prehistory of South Asia. By tracing long-term developments, she seeks to bring to life the first steps toward settled life, urbanism and a state level society in this region, while placing them within the context of similar developments worldwide. Her purpose is to demonstrate the significance of this first civilization in South Asia.

(Muhammad Farooq Swati)