

SCHLINGLOFF, DIETER

The Ancient Indian City. A Comparative Study

[“Die altindische Stadt. Eine vergleichende Untersuchung”]

Wiesbaden: Verlag Franz Steiner, 1969; 67 pp.

In the present Academy treatise the author's main concern is to correlate the extensive archaeological researches of the past decades in the field of ancient Indian town-planning and the statements on this subject in the ancient Sanskrit texts. After some specimens of texts from Sanskrit and Middle Indo-Aryan, which give a stereotype description of the Indian conception of an ideal city, the results of the excavations of 17 ancient Indian cities, all of whose names are well known from the literature (*Vidiśā*, *Ujjayinī*, *Kānyakubja* etc.), are next presented together with lucid site-plans (p. 12–21). This reveals a great many common factors that can be regarded as “representative of the type of the ancient Indian city in general” (p. 22): the site on the plain by a river, the moat and a bank with a rampart on it, and the systematic (*suvibhakta*) arrangement of the rows of houses, to which Taxila, as a city that had always been subjected to external influences, makes a notable exception (p. 22 f.). This is followed by comments on the building of the houses, in which the author chiefly compares the findings from the excavation at Bhita (J. Marshall) with the evidence of the literature and pictorial art and shows that even the purely urban houses never renounced their rural origin (p. 24–28). There are informative comments on the site of the ancient Maurya residence at Pāṭaliputra (now Patna) which, on account of its immense size (“the greatest city of all of the ancient world” p. 29), is an entirely exceptional case. As a result of taking the ancient courses of the rivers into account and making a careful check of all the written evidence the author comes to make important corrections of the views held hitherto; these corrections also fully confirm the measurements given by Megasthenes which have often been doubted and considered fantastic (p. 29–44). Some comments on the contrast between Indian and Greek town-planning and the different relationship of ruler and subjects resulting from it conclude this highly successful work which will not only provide the specialist with information, but which, on account of its lucid and attractive presentation of the subject, can also be recommended as an introduction to a complex of problems which has so far been given little attention by classical Indology.

Professor Dr. Hermann Berger