

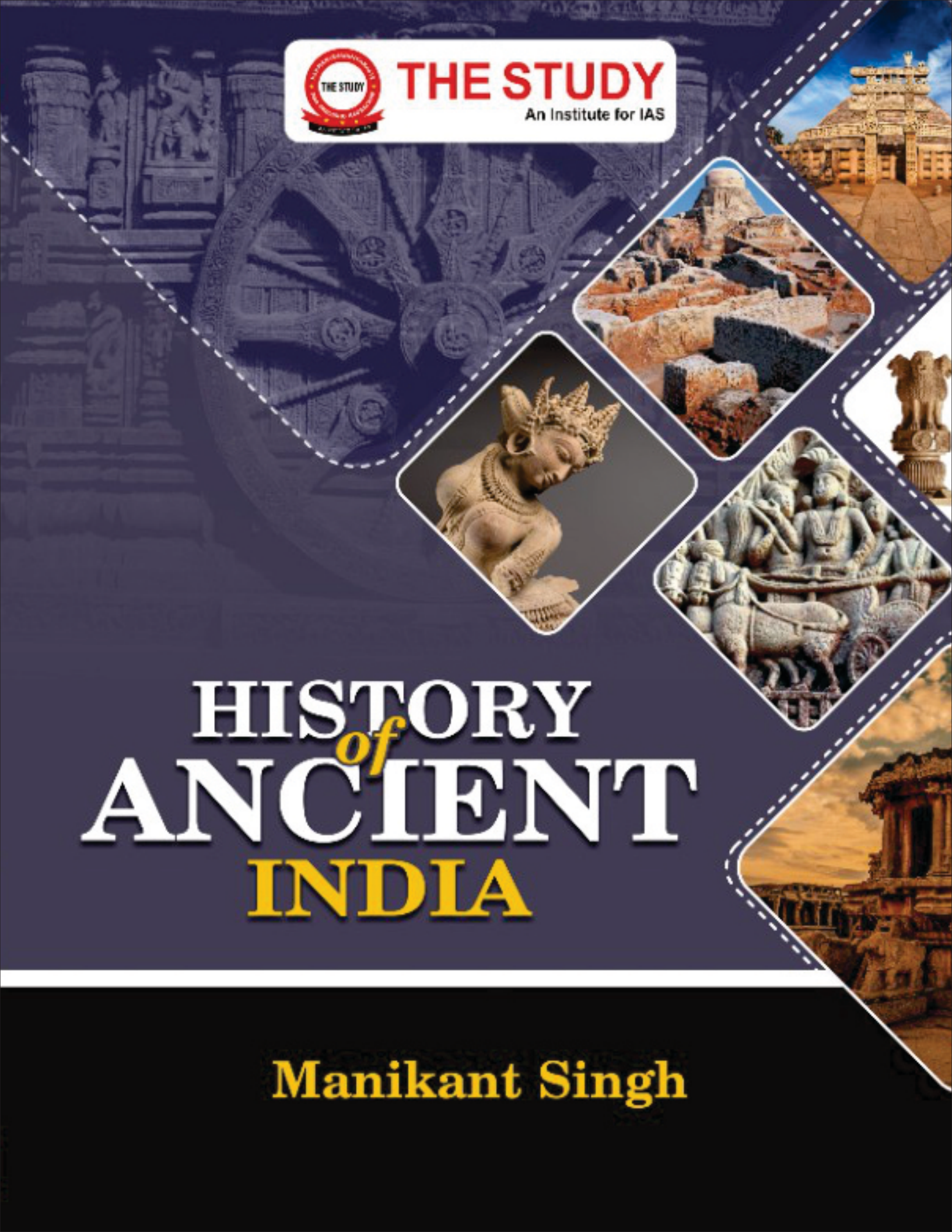


THE STUDY

An Institute for IAS

HISTORY *of* ANCIENT INDIA

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Sources for the study of Harappan civilization:

Harappan civilization is associated with the proto-historical period. Although the Harappan people had a script and they also developed the art of writing, however the script has not been deciphered yet. Therefore, we are almost dependent on the archaeological evidences in the study of Harappa civilization. Meluha is mentioned in the literature of Mesopotamia that gives evidence of the commercial relation between Mesopotamian and Harappan civilization, but its discussion is highly limited in the literature of Mesopotamia.

Therefore, archaeological sources are largely available for the study of Harappan civilization such as buildings and monuments, currency and seals, terracotta and other artifacts. On the basis of these materials, attempts have been made to reconstruct the history of the Harappan civilization.

Historiographical debates regarding Harappa civilization

1. Native Origin v/s Foreign Origin:

- (a) On the one hand, scholars like John Marshall, Stuart Piggott, NG Majumdar, Amalanand Ghosh and R Mughal accept the theory of gradual evolution of Harappan civilization and point towards the pre-Harappan phase. On the other hand, Mortimer Wheeler, Kramer and other scholars attempt to prove it as originating from Mesopotamia.
- (b) In addition, scholars such as Gregory Possehl and Shirin Ratnagar, although not explicitly speaking of Mesopotamian origins, have attempted to link the emergence of the Harappan civilization to the Mesopotamian trade. Similarly, they try to show the role of Mesopotamia trade in its decline also.
- (c) On the other hand, D. K. Chakravarty believes that excavations, conducted in Iran, Turkmenistan and Oman in the 1970s, do not indicate that these regions had trade relations with West Asia even in the early Harappan phase but in the mature stage, the development of commercial relationships can be seen. Therefore, Mesopotamia trade should not be

linked to the emergence of Harappan civilization. Similarly, according to another opinion, Indian region was ahead of West Asia in terms of resources. Therefore, internal trade was more important than external trade in the economic life of the Harappan people. This is the reason why the role of Mesopotamia trade in the emergence and decline of the Harappan civilization should not be overestimated.

2. Debates regarding Mesopotamian origins –

Firstly EGH McKay, Gordon Childe and Kramer emphasized on the theory of Mesopotamia origins in the emergence of the Harappan civilization. They believed that people migrated from Mesopotamia region towards the Indus region and these new visitors laid the foundation of this civilization. Further, Mortimer Wheeler also confirmed this theory, although Wheeler emphasized on the migration of idea rather than migration of people. According to Mortimer, the idea of civilization pervaded the atmosphere of West Asia itself and from there the idea came into the Indus region. Some other scholars who show migration of people from Mesopotamia towards Sindh region, they also try to prove that the people of the ruling class lived in the fort area, they came from outside and here, they tried to separate themselves from the indigenous people.

But in the light of new researches, the above theories became irrelevant. A clear distinction between the Mesopotamian civilization and the Harappan civilization began to appear through analysis at several points. For example:-

1. There are differences in seal, script and design of tools in the two civilizations.
2. The Harappan urbanization is far more systematic than the Mesopotamian civilization.
3. Copper tools were used more in Mesopotamia than Harappa.

Sources of Vedic period:

We have studied the era before the Vedic period and we have only archaeological evidences for available to us. On the basis of these evidences, we have drawn the picture of economic and to some extent social life, while the information about political system and religious thought could not be obtained. But when literary materials became available in the Vedic period, then we also got information about political and religious thinking of Vedic Aryans in detail. At the same time, social and economic life was highlighted much more.

But there is another side of the picture that cannot be ignored. First, the Vedic Aryans did not use any script and their literature was carried forward in oral tradition. Therefore, the first problem is about authenticity of literature. It is difficult to determine the period of literature. Some parts of this literature were related to this period but some were associated with later period but the problem to identify which of the parts are original and which have been added in later period. For example, after analysis it has been found that 1st, 8th, 9th and 10th Mandalas were added in the Rigveda in later period. Secondly, Vedic literature cannot be considered popular literature because it belongs to the priestly class or the Brahmin class. Therefore, this literature does not express the aspirations of the common people. Thirdly, the literary sources did not provide details of all areas equally. To obtain information about some sphere, we have to deal with archaeological evidences.

Therefore, the importance of archaeological evidence not only remained parallel to literary evidence, but its importance grew in the later periods. Painted Grey Ware culture is generally associated with the Vedic era, although to some extent, there is still a problem of compatibility between them. However, on the basis of similarity of life reflected in both of them, we try to relate them to each other. As we know that the Rigveda period is believed to be 1500 BCE. It is almost contemporary to Avesta, an Iranian text. On the other hand, the earlier

phase of Painted Grey Ware culture, which is found in Bhagwanpura, Dadheri, Nagar and Katpalan, is associated with the pre-iron phase, i.e. people used copper or bronze in that period but not iron. Not only this, the word 'Ayas' is also found in the Rigveda, which is related to copper and bronze, but no such word can be found which can be associated with iron. It is believed that the Painted Grey Ware culture had a pre-Iron phase associated with the Rigvedic period. There are evidences of iron from most of the sites associated with Painted Grey Ware culture, and on the other hand, the word 'Shyam Ayas' or Krishna Ayas is used for iron in the later Vedic texts. This means that the later Vedic period was associated with the iron phase.

Then, the limitation of the use of both archaeological and literary material is that the use of archaeological materials is to justify the information given by the literary material only. Sometimes these archaeological materials justify what is mentioned in literary evidence and sometimes they do not. But they provide an alternative view. Earlier this alternative approach was ignored but now it is taken seriously, for example, literary evidence describes not only struggle between Aryans and non-Aryans, but also indicates about cultural coherence itself and its basis is the presence of many Dravidian and Munda etymological words in the Vedic Sanskrit. On the other hand, the archaeological materials indicate towards harmony rather than conflict, for example the presence of Black and Red Pottery and Grey Pottery with Painted Grey Ware indicates that the Vedic Aryans lived together in the same settlement.

Question: Analysis the different opinions regarding the information obtained from Vedic sources about human settlements.

Answer: After coming to India, the Vedic Aryans lived a life of semi-nomads. So they kept changing their residence. But in the later Vedic period, they started living a permanent life. Finally their permanent settlements developed. We get information about Vedic settlements

Sources of Study

Literary sources: As compared to the Vedic period, literary materials are available in abundance as a source of study in this period. Religious literatures as well as non-religious literatures and foreign literatures are also available. So there are sufficient variations in the literary sources. One advantage of this situation is that we can draw a better picture by comparative study of different sources.

Religious literature

Brahmin Literature: Some Upanishadas, six Vedangas and Kalpa Sutra in Vedangas have special significance in this context. Sutra literature covers Shrouta Sutra, Griha Sutra and Dharma Sutra, and then commentaries on this literature by Boddhayana, Aapastava, Gautama and Vasishtha are also important. But Brahmin literature has been written with keeping the higher Varnas of the society at centre while the lower Varnas have been disregarded.

Buddhist and Jaina Literature: In Buddhist literature, Tripitaka is important as Sutapitaka, Vinayapitaka and Abhidhamma Pitaka. In Sutta Pitaka also, the Angutaranikaya, the Dirghanikaya etc. throw a special light on the political, economic and social system of this period. Similarly, Bhadrabahuchariat, Kalpa Sutra, Bhagavati Sutra etc. are important under Jaina literature. Above all, Buddhist and Jaina literature, written in Pali and Prakrit respectively, reflect an alternative view in historiography and also expresses the outlook of the relatively lower castes of society.

Non-Religious Literature: In this context, we can take Kautilya's Arthashastra because some part in Kautilya's Arthashastra is related with pre-Mauryan period.

Foreign literature: During this period there was an Iranian and Greek invasion of the North Western India. Therefore some Greek writers have also highlighted the history of the North Western part. First Herodotus wrote about India, then some scholars, Nearchus, Casius, Onesicritus etc. who came with the Alexander, have thrown light on the region of North Western India. In a

sense, the only source we have for the history of North West is the Greek accounts. Above all, when the word 'Sandrokotes', used by the Greek writer, was identified with Chandragupta Maurya by William Johns, then the mystery of Indian history itself was solved.

Archaeological source: Literary evidences have its limitations. Literary texts were written in the later period, so the question of authenticity arises here. Naturally the importance of archaeological materials is established there -

1. **NBPW:** It is associated with Mahajanapada period. Its expansion is much greater than the Painted Grey Pottery cultur. There are about 1500 sites of this culture and these sites extend from Taxila in the North West to Tamluk in the east and Amravati in the south. This pottery represents better stage of development from the earlier pottery and indicates towards an advanced materialistic state.

2. **Punch Marked Coins:** Use of Punch Marked coins in the Indian subcontinent dates back to around 5th century BCE. These coins were made of silver and copper and many types of pictures were inscribed on them. During this period, the Punch Marked coins of Nanda rulers have been found from Golakpur in Patna. These coins were issued by trading guilds (Shrenis), not by the state or any ruler.

Approach Related to Historiography

A disagreement between two different perspectives can be seen in the study of the history of the Mahajanapada period - **Nationalist approach** and **Marxist approach**. But at the same time we also find disagreement between two other perspectives and they are Marxists and Revisionists.

Main points of controversies:

Debate over 'State formation':

1. According to the nationalist school, there was an attempt to link the process of state-formation in India with the Aryan invasion, but Marxist scholars saw this

Sources of study

There are three major sources for the study of the Mauryan period:

1. Kautilya's Arthashastra

Kautilya's Arthashastra is considered to be the major source for the study of Mauryan period. However, it is not written during any single period. It has been compiled from the 4th century BCE to the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE. However, we can infer that a significant portion of this text is compiled in the Mauryan period as we find similarities between the terminology used in the Ashokan inscriptions and the Kautilya's Arthashastra.

In the context of India, Artha is considered as one Purusharthas (goal) out of the four Purusharthas. Traditionally, artha was always placed secondary to religion (Dharama), but the importance of Kautilya's Arthashastra is that it gave more importance to Artha than Dharma and 'Kama' because in his view, Artha is the only means to fulfill other Purusharthas. Therefore the emphasis of the Arthashastra is on conquering the Earth, which is the source of *Artha*. According to the Arthashastra, the ruler, who can conquer and control more and more territory, would be successful. As it lays great emphasis on military force and diplomacy to maintain control over Artha, therefore it has more inclination towards Political Science than Economics.

It has 15 parts in which 5 parts are related to the internal administration, 8 parts to the foreign relations and 2 parts provide mixed information. It throws light on the immediate political, economic and social system. In the political system, the ruler has been kept at the focal point and his responsibilities have been mentioned in details and the Council of Ministers has also been discussed. Then, 18 Tirtha and 27 Adhyakshasa have been highlighted in the central administration. Apart from this, Arthashastra has also provided detailed information about provincial administration, local administration, judicial administration, urban administration, military administration, intelligence system etc.

But an important limitation of this text is to be lack of authenticity. In other words, the political structure that is presented in Arthashastra seems like a small state, not a vast empire like the Maurya Empire. Therefore, the question arises as to how it should be considered as a text of the Mauryan period? In fact, here, we should note that the style of Arthashastra is not descriptive but formulaic. Arthashastra describes *Vijigishu* -a state which is quickly intended towards military conquest and political expansion. Hence it can be inferred that this state will be close to the Mauryan Empire which itself will be intended towards expansion.

However, to get a more reliable account of the Mauryan period, the information given by Kautilya's Arthashastra needs to be confirmed from other sources as well.

2. Megasthenes's Indica

Megasthenes came to the court of Mauryan ruler Chandragupta Maurya as ambassador of Syrian ruler Seleucus Nicator. He has given details of the events held in end of 4th century BCE. He stayed in the court of Chandragupta Maurya for many years and with great curiosity, he tried to be familiar with the new country, its geography, climate, animals and birds.

Megasthenes's Indica is also considered an important source in the study of the Mauryan period. He had observed personally the ruler and various part of the Mauryan administration. In his view, the ruler always seems to be industrious and endeavoring to perform his obligations. Megasthenes showed special interest in the town administration description and mentioned 6 committees in the administration of Pataliputra. He holds an officer named Astinomoi responsible for the city administration. Similarly, as district Officer, he refers to an officer named Agronomoi. In his view, he was also responsible for the development of irrigation. Then Megasthenes also details 6 committees for the military administration. Megasthenes looks at Indian society and divides it into seven castes. If we

08 CHAPTER

Post-Mauryan Period

Sources:

A large number of literary works are available as a source of study for this period. Along with this, archaeological materials are also available.

Literary sources:

In literary sources, we get a huge list of indigenous and foreign literature. Since Sanskrit revived during this period, most of the works are found in Sanskrit. Buddhism Also adopted Sanskrit language and a large number of Avadana literature were written. Above all, the most important work is Manu Samhita (200 BCE - 200 BCE) which highlighted economic, social and cultural life of this period. Then, in this period, the composition of Puranas also took place and works like Ramayana and Mahabharata also throw light on the era.

Above all, one important source of this period is foreign literature. The works of Roman writers such as - Pliny, Strabo, Diodorus, Arian, etc. provide vast information on the trade. Apart from this, a work written by an unknown author named Periplus of the Erythraean Sea also highlights the maritime trade.

Avadana is a type of literature correlating previous lives' virtuous deeds to the next lives' events. These stories illustrate the workings of 'KARMA'. These stories are usually narrated by Buddha. This literature includes a number of Sanskrit works, including Mahasamghika's *Mahavastu* (Great Book), the Sarvastivada's *Avadanasataka* (*Century of Legends*) and *Divyavadana* (*The Heavenly Legend*). This group of literature also includes the stories on Ashoka. *Avadanas* occupy the same position for Buddhism that the Puranas do in Hinduism. They act in a similar way to other texts describing past deeds or past lives held in other traditions in the region, such as the aforementioned Puranas and the Kalpa Sutra of Jainism.

Archaeological Materials

Archaeology not only underlines the material culture of the time, it also gives us a glimpse of the intangible

aspects of the culture e.g. religious practices/rituals etc. Excavation of the ancient cities has unearthed a range of artifacts including deluxe potteries in wide ranging shapes and designs, terracotta art etc. But, vertical excavations pose a limit to what can be known via this method. In North India, we see a significant expansion of the urban centres during this period. Settlement are often fortified and planned. In Deccan and South, some sites show a clear transition from the later Megalithic to the urban historical phase. But many cities do not show any previous occupation levels.

Other sources include coins which are immensely helpful to establish the dynastic history. Indo-Greeks were the first to issue coins which could be definitely attributed to the Kings. The bilingual and bi-script legends of their coins are the principle source to study the Indo-Greek Kings. The Kushanas possibly issued the largest number of gold coins. They also issued low denomination copper coins. Their coins had impressions of Kings as well as Gods. Satvahanas issues a variety of coins in lead, potin, copper and silver. These coins are useful to study the economic side of the Satvahana kingdom. Roman gold coins drained into India on account of a flourishing trade, especially in the Peninsular India. These coins were locally imitated too. The Sangam Kingdoms- Chola, Chera and Pandyas- also issued punch marked coins which can be identified from the motifs on these coins. Many republics issued coins viz. Uddehikas, Malavas, Arjunyanas etc. Otherwise, we may not have known them at all. The city administration of certain prosperous cities issued coins as well viz. Tripuri, Ujjayani, Mahishmati, Varanasi, Taxila, Madhyamika, Airikina (Eran/Airikina) etc. The **Nigama coins** (fewer in number though) reflect the position of Nigamas (merchant guilds) in the economy of that time.

During this period, c. 200 BCE- 300 BCE, the number of inscriptions shoots up. In North, the Sanskrit replaced the Prakrit as the inscription language. Rudradaman's Junagadh inscription was the first inscription in the chaste Sanskrit. In South, earliest Tamil inscriptions start appearing from this period.

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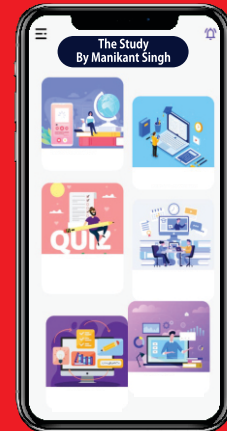


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