



Minerals and Metals in Ancient India (2 Vol. Set)

Arun Kumar Biswas, Sulekha Biswas

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In two volumes, the book tells the fascinating, coherently woven story of the Minerals and Metals from across the entire sub-continental sprawl of the old-world India (including Pakistan and Bangladesh). Covering a vast span of over five millennia: from the Pre-Harappan Chalcolithic sites, like Mehargarh, Mundigak and Ganeshwar to about ad 1200, Volume 1 is a brilliant effort to unravel the mysteries of archaeo-materials with scientific inquiry into both the modes of production and use of minerals, gems, metals, alloys and other kindred artefacts. Including, as he does, a chronological discussion of the specifically excavated sites, from Mehargarh to Taxila, Professor Arun Biswas captures a panoramic view of the hoary, richly variegated cultures which, in their final analysis, lead him not only to question the diffusionist theory concerning the Aryan intrusion, but also to highlight, among a range of his first-time-arrived conclusions, the primacy of India in the areas of non-ferrous ore mining, production of carburised iron, wootz, steel, forge-welding of wrought iron, distilled zinc and high-zinc brass. Barring the foreign travellers accounts, the volume draws exclusively on archaeological evidence. Volume 2 approaches the theme from the viewpoint of indigenous literary sources chronologically marshalling over three thousand years of Sanskrit writings: ranging from Rigveda to Rasaratnasamuccaya. Reviewing, among other things, the entire gamut of studies in gemmology (ratnashastra) and alchemy (rasashastra), the authors here set out a meticulous analysis of Rasaratnasamuccaya: a fourteenth century text, high-lighting the climactic heights of iatrochemistry in ancient India. With detailed explanations of Sanskrit technical expressions, the volume also tries to correlate, wherever possible, literary evidence with archaeological data. Sponsored by the Indian National Science Academy (INSA), New Delhi, Minerals and Metals in Ancient India has involved years of the authors painstaking research. Together with maps, figures, tables, appendices and illustrative photographs, it will evoke enormous interest in geologists, metallurgists, archaeo-metallurgists, mineralogists, gemmologists, historians of science, archaeologists, Indologists, and the scholars of Indian pre- and ancient history.

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