

Indo-Eurasian list:

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Indo-Eurasian_research/

Sat Feb 28, 2009 9:14 pm. **Steve Farmer <saf@...>**
[yukifarmer](#)

Dear Doris,

To continue the discussion of recent techniques of the Hindu right in the U.S. -- this time involving the expensive conferences they are sponsoring (most recently the "Sindhu-Sarasvati Civilization" [read Indus Civilization, Vedicized] Conference they held in southern California last week -- in response to your question this morning:

> Do you anticipate that those espousing "the Hindutva line" will
> now go into areas other than U.S. textbooks - to propagandize
> their views ?

We've been receiving reports on the Conference all week, but we haven't posted them since they don't have anything to do with legitimate research -- and we don't want discussion of premodern studies fixed around pseudo-historical issues driven by contemporary S. Asian political agendas. As accustomed, discussion of these issues on weekends is fine, however.

The papers that were given last week are pretty funny. We have the report I give below from one Indologist who audited the mess discretely from the sidelines. Since researchers who criticize these people openly can expect to be slandered (and their careers can in fact be threatened) I give his/her note here anonymously, with a little light editing, mainly so the sender can't be identified. After that, I'll give snippets from a few of the papers, most of which are amusing (read: idiotic and amateurish) crap indeed, as our correspondent suggests:

> Hi, Steve,
>
> I am sending you the abstracts for the papers that were presented
> at the LMU Conference this past weekend (February 21-22, 2009) for
> your reading pleasure, enjoyment (if you like reading fiction, as
> opposed to non-fiction), comments and, perhaps, even a little
> humor.... Editorially speaking, there seems to be a strong scent of

> pure desperation in most of these papers [in their attempts] to
> portray their contents as "mainstream" academic thoughts on the
> topic(s) addressed (or, more properly, glossed over) in the papers.
> Compared with the 2003 Conference at California State University at
> Long Beach [SF: in which a number of vocal critics of the "Sindhu-
> Sarasvati Civilization" nonsense, including me, were invited
> speakers: this time, quite conspicuously, none at all were invited,
> although the funders of the two Conferences are the same],
> these presentations seem to lack objectivity and any claims to
> intellectual honesty and integrity in the views about the Indus
> Valley... presented at the LMU Conference. I think that it
> would have been much better to have had some serious discussions of
> these papers from the "other side of the desk," so to speak, rather
> than a lot of bobbing heads in agreement with the presenters. I can
> understand why you and Michael would not lend credence to such
> quixotic enterprises as the LMU Conference.... The thing that
> really amazes me is that there was so much "cherry picking" and
> selectivity in only presenting the points that support the views in
> these papers, while the very strong evidence in both Vedic and
> Avestan texts, the entire question of horses, among other very
> relevant considerations of meaningful evidence were omitted on a
> wholesale basis. I have been studying the Indus Valley
> civilizations for 40+ years now with some noted scholars and
> have never heard such Sakritam as I did from this conference. If I
> didn't know any better, I would have left this conference thinking
> that the complete "decipherment" of the Indus Valley seals is now a
> fait accompli. My concerns here are that these views, when
> presented to students of the Indus Valley civilizations, are
> destructive in that they are not truthful and lack credibility.....
> Academic Freedom and debate should take place within the academy,
> so that we all advance the discussions, but there are limitations
> upon academic fictions, masquerading as "light and truth."

Amusing (depressing) snippets from the Conference:

1. S.R. Rao, who claimed (to much linguistic ridicule, even from his fellow Hindutvavadins) in the 70s and 80s that the so-called Indus script was a phonetic system (he did this in impossible fashion by breaking the hundreds of highly pictographic Indus symbols into individual strokes supposedly corresponding to Sanskrit sounds) repeats part of his arguments (which have never found a single supporter) in the Conference, adding that "to understand the system of writing (sic) and its language (sic) by a systematic analysis of

Indus signs in relation to the semitic script (sic!!) and the Rigvedic or Old Indo-Aryan Sanskrit language."

The "semitic script"? Amazing stuff: the geniuses of the Indus Valley (oops, Sindhu-Sarasvati Civilization) invented the alphabet, apparently, and passed it on to the Mediterranean.

2. The Greek writer Nicholas Kazanas, whose work Michael Witzel deconstructed in hilarious fashion in the *Journal of Indo-European Studies* (JHS) a few years ago, assured the Conference, in a paper wonderfully entitled "The Rig Veda Predates the Sindhu-Sarasvati Culture" (a familiar if ridiculous argument made for modern political reasons too well-known to repeat here) that:

- > there are some ten characteristic features of the Sindhu-Sarasvati
- > Culture which are not found in the Rig Veda [SF: the point of this
- > odd claim is that apparently these were innovations that came *after*
- > the RV]. Moreover, paleo-astronomical evidence (mainly in
- > N. Achar's work) places some Brahmana texts at around 3000 (sic!)
- > and the oldest layers of the Mahabharata at 3067. All this (and
- > more) suggests that (the bulk of) the Rig Veda should be assigned
- > to well before 3200 BCE, however unpalatable to mainstream
- > thought this may be.

Wow, forgetting whatever "ten characteristic features of the Sindhu-Sarasvati Culture" supposedly go beyond the supposedly *earlier* Rig Veda, you have to wonder about a few things that the Sindhu-Sarasvati wisemen apparently forgot about, including RV horses and chariots. But perhaps (as N.S. Rajaram has often suggested), the Harappans had knowledge of advanced atomic physics and used nuclear-powered transport methods.

They flew this guy in from Greece to present this crap?

I also like the bit about the "oldest layers of the Mahabharata" being placed with remarkable precision at 3067 BCE, over 2500 years before the dates set by MhB specialists. Any opinions from the Indian epic specialists on the List? :^)

3. Shiva Bajpai, whom the RSS-backed "Hindu Education Foundation" initially conned the California Department of Education into being appointed as an official textbook advisor to the State -- Bajpai's long links to the Hindu right are unambiguous and well-known -- gives

us this little gem of an abstract:

- > Sapta-Sindhu: Geographical Identification and Archaeological Evidences
- >
- > Shiva Bajpai
- >
- > The Vedic Sapta Sindhu, old Persian Hapta-Hindu, Greek Indus/India,
- > and the Chinese Yin-tu was the first name of the country of the
- > Sindhu-Sarasvati Civilizations and its extensive ecumene covered
- > the vast region from the Kubua (Kabul) River in the west to the
- > Ganga River in the east. The overlapping of the Vedic and Harappan
- > civilization in space and time resolves the dilemma of an entirely
- > literary Vedic culture contrasted with an exclusively
- > archaeological Harappan culture. We are now at the threshold of
- > correctly writing the new history of early India/South Asia and, by
- > extension, providing the basis for a new approach to the larger
- > Eurasian Aryan question.

So "India" was a "country" in the 3rd millennium BCE (or earlier: I'm not certain how far back Bajpai places the "Sindhu-Sarasvati Civilization")? This from a supposed professional researcher?

Basta. The only interesting question about Conferences like this is why a few legitimate researchers -- the same ones predictably again and again (like Kenoyer) -- take the sponsors' money and show up to give their papers side-by-side with Hindutva hacks. All this ends up in doing is legitimizing these far-right conferences in the eyes of the unsuspecting public.

But that's a moral and not scholarly problem for discussion some other time: enough on this topic from me if I can help it over the weekend. I know that Michael will have something to say on these issues after his plane lands.

I should be able to post the 63-page CAPEEM judgment later today or tomorrow. Hopefully the results will be discussed *widely* in print in Indian newspapers: this is a defining moment in the international fight against political adulterations of ancient history in textbooks.

Steve