



CENTRE
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JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY IN KRAKÓW

Plagues and Brahmins: did a combination of epidemics and ideology empty India's cities?

public lecture by **Professor Johannes Bronkhorst**

02.05.19, 16:00
Nowa Prowincja
Bracka 3-5, Kraków

Brahmanism did not like urban life. A number of early texts say so explicitly, others ignore cities altogether, presenting an image of an ideal world that no longer existed (assuming for argument's sake that it ever existed). Brahmanism made a concerted effort to project a certain image of Brahmins and the world they live in. This world was partly based on an idealized memory of the past; partly it represented the present interests of those Brahmins. The ideal Brahmin had no truck with the corruptions of modern life, such as city dwelling, the use of debased dialects (i.e., of languages other than Sanskrit), and much else. Instead he lived (or presented himself as living, or as wishing to live) in a pure and idyllic āśrama, he used Sanskrit, i.e. the original and pure language, and he did not use modern inventions such as writing.

The Brahmanical dislike for urban life had profound consequences. Scholars have pointed out that it played a role in the decline of the urban and mercantile economy of the subcontinent roughly from the third century onward.

However, another factor no doubt played a role in combination with Brahmanical ideology: urban diseases and epidemics. Their historical role in other civilizations (Europe, China, and of course America after its “discovery”) is well known. They are systematically overlooked in the case of South Asia. This paper will attempt to put the record straight.

The lecture will be presented in **English**.

This event is **free** and no tickets or registration are required.

Professor Johannes Bronkhorst (**University of Lausanne**, Switzerland) is a visiting professor at the **Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations** of the Jagiellonian University.