

Fall 2016

# Orientalism and the Archaeological Survey(s) of India

Ilan Desai-Geller

*SIT Study Abroad*, ilan\_desai-geller@brown.edu

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## Recommended Citation

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# Orientalism and the Archaeological Survey(s) of India

Ilan Desai-Geller  
Dr. M.N. Storm  
Dr. M.N. Storm, SIT Study Abroad  
SIT: Study Abroad  
National Identity and the Arts  
Fall 2016

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## Abstract

This study is an investigation of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). It was inspired by the somewhat incongruous fact that the ASI, which now exhorts visitors to its monuments to feel pride in their heritage, was founded by British colonialists who felt that contemporary Indian society was in shambles and in need of Western domination. In an attempt to investigate the completeness of this transformation, this study traces key events and figures in the ideological, institutional, and academic history of the study of the Indian past, paying close attention to the relationship between scholarship and colonialism. This analysis, combined with observations of the contemporary ASI sites of Ajanta and Badami reveal that while the explicit messaging of the ASI has changed since its colonial inception, its distribution of resources, as well as the type of scholarship it produces remain well within the boundaries of what colonial knowledge.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks are first due to Dr. Mary Storm, the advisor to my project. This project was born out of discussions and disagreements, voiced and unvoiced, about politics and the nature of the study of the Indian past with Dr. Storm. She is this study's unspoken interlocutor, and is, in some senses, equal author to it as I. Moreover, her support – academic, bibliographic, logistical, and personal – were the foundations without which this project could never have happened. Her constant flow of suggestions were welcome enjoiners to consider my project in a larger context and to never forget the myriad ways this web of people, places, and ideas can expand and become more complex.

I am further indebted to Mr. D.S. Danve, for the kind words, for agreeing to speak with me twice, and for teaching me things I did not know I needed to learn; to Mr. Sheikh Nazir Ahmed to an incredible generosity with his time; and to Panchu for a wealth of information I fear I was unable to do justice to in this paper. Their perspectives on archaeology and the Indian past, infinitely more nuanced than my own, were vital to this project, and I hope that I have represented appropriately.

Thanks also to the Archaeological Survey of India for allowing me into their archives and giving me a historical perspective I never would have hoped to achieve.

## Introduction

As is the case with any post-colonial nation attempting to rehabilitate itself from degradation of colonial occupation, imagined communities and histories have come to play a fundamental role in India. Indeed, given the massive cultural and historical diversity contained within the (colonial) invention of India, these identities and imaginaries needed to be very carefully constructed by the founders of the modern nation (and the violent rise of Hindu nationalism in the past decades has demonstrated the unfortunately limited success of these constructions). This study will focus on the ambiguous positionality of one of the most important players in the initial construction and continuing reconstructions of the Indian national identity: The Archaeological Survey of India (hereafter ASI).

This organization, the pride of India (and to some extent the world) in the 1950s,<sup>1</sup> which proudly pushed further and further back the inauguration of Indian civilization, which validated India's claims and aspirations to be of global significance, was inaugurated in 1861 by British colonists committed to the expansion of British colonial power in India. This study asks, simply, whether there remain traces of the colonial origin of the organization in its contemporary operation, and what to make of them.

Despite the integral part played by the past, however, and the space given to it, this study is primarily concerned with the present. That is, the ASI's early history forms a key component of the study, but the objective is not to present a detailed portrait of the early, nor to fully explain the complex and contradicting commitments of British colonialists. Rather, it attempts to trace methodologies and modes of knowledge production from the ASI's early days to the present. It

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<sup>1</sup> Chadha, Ashish. "Visions of Discipline: Sir Mortimer Wheeler and the Archaeological Method in India (1944-1948)." *Journal of Social Archaeology* 2, no. 3 (2002): 378–401, 378.

then asks if there are valuable insights to be gained from thinking of these continuities considering their colonial origin. For example, is Sir Alexander Cunningham's innovative use of literary texts to inform his excavation program better thought of in the context of the burgeoning field of archaeology or given his position as a Colonel in the British army engaged in colonial control? Of course, the simple answer is that both frames are indispensable to a fuller understanding of Sir Cunningham and his practice. The question remains, however, does his literary strategy make *more* sense in a colonial rather than archaeological frame? What does the colonial frame add to the more conventional and accepted archaeological frame? These questions, this type of interrogation forms the core of the historical methodology I use in this paper. I attempt not only to demonstrate that practices have been passed down from British to Indian management of the ASI, but also to demonstrate the value of seeing these legacies in a colonial context. To show why and how it matters in the way that the public receives the information produced by the ASI, and accesses the sites it manages.

Indeed, this is the most crucial frame to the work of this paper. The discussion of colonial inheritances is important to this study in the way that it illuminates and tangibly affects way that people are allowed to access their past *in the present*; as far as these inheritances continue to have perceptible effects in the ASI's *current* management practices and the literature it produces (both in and outside of sites). The heart of this paper, then, is the comparative study of the way the ASI manages and writes about the cave temple sites in Badami, Karnataka and Ajanta, Maharashtra that comes at its end.

These sites were chosen because of the substantial differences in their histories as monuments in the public imagination despite superficial similarities. As we shall see, although they are both cave temples from the middle of the first millennium CE with academically

acclaimed sculpture, the one is internationally recognized as one of the finest monuments of Indian antiquity, and the other suffers from relative unknown.<sup>2</sup> I have compared the contemporary condition of the sites, the amount of restoration work done to them, and the way their management and popularity was affected by independence. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, I have analyzed the literature the ASI disseminates about the two different sets of caves in relation to contemporary academic understandings of the two sites.

The paper moves chronologically. It begins with a series of sketches of important figures in the formation of the British Orientalist discourse on the Indian past. Attention is paid specifically to the ideologies at play in their thinking and work, and to the effect they would have on further scholarship. As the ASI was increasingly institutionalized around independence (and less subject to the peculiarities of important figures), the analysis shifts to the legal framework governing archaeological endeavors in the country as well as the way the past is represented in government narratives. The study closes with the aforementioned analyses of the Badami and Ajanta sites and conclusions about the contemporary ASI.

## Beginnings

When introducing Indology, it is common practice to begin with the late 18<sup>th</sup> century career of Sir William Jones.<sup>3</sup> The first sentence of the “History” page of the ASI’s website states unequivocally that “archaeological and historical pursuits in India started with the efforts of Sir

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<sup>2</sup> For an overwhelmingly laudatory description of the Ajanta caves that also mentions its similarities to Badami, see Shrinivasrao, Shrimant Bhawanrao. *Ajanta: A Handbook of Ajanta Caves Descriptive of the Paintings and Sculpture Therein*. Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1932.

<sup>3</sup> To cite just two examples of the many possibilities: Tartakov, Gary Michael. “Changing Views of India’s Art History.” In *Perceptions of South Asia’s Visual Past*, 1st ed., 15–36. New Delhi: Oxford & IBH, 1994. 14; Johnson-Roehr, Susan. “The Archaeological Survey of India and Communal Violence in Post Independence India.” *Journal of Heritage Studies* 14, no. 6 (2008): 506–23. doi:10.1080/13527250802503266. 508.



William Jones.”<sup>4</sup> This is, however, a blatant untruth. As Romila Thapar clearly delineates in 2013’s *The Past Before Us: Historical Traditions of Early North India*, there were substantial Hindu traditions of explicitly historiographical biographies, hagiographies and chronicles that were established long before British rule.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, contemporary archaeologists will often cite historical texts as evidence in their reconstructions of the past, acknowledging both *the simple existence of these historical pursuits* as well as their ample truth value.<sup>6</sup> This all not to mention the even larger, and even more verifiable and accurate court histories of India’s Muslim sultanates.<sup>7</sup> The idea that there was no history in India before the British was, in fact, a British colonial invention;<sup>8</sup> they were the ones who felt that the history of the land still needed to be written, even as they paradoxically took advantage of resident’s knowledge of their local histories and geographies to create their own.<sup>9</sup> To say, then, that “archaeological and historical pursuits” in all of India “started” with Sir William Jones is both to demonstrate that the ASI sees itself explicitly in the legacy of the British Indologists and to erase thousands of years of historical knowledge. It is true, of course, that one cannot assign the same imperial intentions to the ASI as one might to the early British explorers, but the construction is nonetheless indicative of a deep dependence on British sources for perspectives on the Indian past, and to perpetuate the notion that studies of the Indian past would never have happened without the British.

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<sup>4</sup> Archaeological Survey of India. “History.” Government. *Archaeological Survey of India*, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Mukhia, Harbans. “Indian Historiography Under Threat.” *The Hindu*. October 27, 2016. <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/indian-historiography-under-threat/article7806593.ece>.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Walter Spink’s reliance on a novel written 100 years later for the crucial events of the late 5<sup>th</sup> century. Spink, Walter. “Ajanta in a Historical and Political Context.” *Maharashtra Pathik*, September 1990.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Asher, Catherine, and Thomas Metcalf. “Introduction.” In *Perceptions of South Asia’s Visual Past*, 1st ed., 1–12. New Delhi: Oxford & IBH, 1994. 2.

The career of Sir William Jones is, however, an appropriate place to start in analyzing the British tradition of scholarship on the Indian past. Jones came to India in 1783 to work as a magistrate for the British East India Company in Calcutta. By that time, the 37-year-old Oxford graduate had already published extensively on European and Middle Eastern classics. Jones' academic predilections and desire to understand the legal system of those he would be governing led him to undertake a more level-headed and earnest attempt to understand the Indian past than any Westerner before.<sup>10</sup>

Jones' initial studies were essentially in solitude. Few among the British took an interest in understanding Indian culture and past in the way that Jones did, and among those who did, none had his academic acumen or his remarkable linguistic ability (it is said that Jones was familiar with upwards of 30 languages). To cultivate the serious study of India, Jones, along with some acquaintances he had made in Calcutta, founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784. This was the first institution with the purpose of supporting and facilitating scholarship about India, and remains, in some ways, Jones' most important legacy in the field of archaeology.<sup>11</sup>

Equally important as the institutional apparatus he created were the philosophical, ideological, and methodological priorities with which Jones and his associates imbued the nascent discipline of Indology. Philosophically, Jones, like most Europeans at the time, was a student of the Enlightenment. He was deeply inculcated with the movement's famed thirst for universal knowledge; he shared the priority it gave to understanding the world through genealogy; he accepted as truth the notion that communities were governed by inherent and essential traits and; most of all, he was a believer in the supreme standing the Enlightenment

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<sup>10</sup> Keay, John. *India Discovered: The Recovery of a Lost Civilization*. 3rd ed. London: HarperCollins, 2001. 19-38.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

gave to reason, logic, and discovery.<sup>12</sup> These personal convictions can be seen in the very idea of founding an organization like the Asiatic Society. It reflected a sense that the past was available to be understood and known, and that it was the obligation (beyond mere interest) of scholar-gentlemen to find it out. In his inaugural address to the society, Jones tellingly defined the scope of the organization as “Man [sic] and Nature – whatever is performed by the one or produced by the other.”<sup>13</sup> This was no joke, but an earnest reflection of the Enlightenment sensibilities that knowledge was at its heart undifferentiated, and a sound mind with the proper methodology could come to know and understand *it all*.

Jones’ institutional legacy was augmented expanded with the creation of the journal “Asiatick Researches” in 1788.<sup>14</sup> Both the inauguration of the society and the publication of the journal were instrumental in beginning the transformation of what was until then a personal pastime into an academic discipline. They provided crucial connections that allowed for scholars to learn from one another, to push each other, and, most significantly, to establish a body of knowledge about the past. No longer would interested parties need to begin afresh with each endeavor; they could now rely on the accumulated knowledge of those who had come before.

Jones was also a believer in the Enlightenment idea that all of humanity was descended from a common ancestor.<sup>15</sup> Indeed this conviction was reinforced (and in turn reinforced) his burgeoning understanding of a common history uniting the Sanskrit and the classical European languages.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately for Indians, and unfortunately for the discipline of Indology, however, Jones also took the concept to indicate the decline of Indian civilization from its lofty

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<sup>12</sup> Dirks, Nicholas B. “Guiltless Spoliations: Picturesque Beauty, Colonial Knowledge, and Colin Mackenzie’s Survey of India.” In *Perceptions of South Asia’s Visual Past*, 1st ed., 211–33. New Delhi: Oxford & IBH, 1994. 211.

<sup>13</sup> Keay 38.

<sup>14</sup> Archaeological Survey of India. “History.” Government. *Archaeological Survey of India*, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Johnson-Roehr. 508.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 508.

roots (i.e. the ancestor it shared with Europe) to a lowly contemporary state.<sup>17</sup> Despite being a friend of the American Revolution, he was an exponent of British dominion in India, operating with the assumption that Indians needed a rational European government to save themselves in the modern day.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, Jones was a pioneer of the philological method in India. Jones very rarely left Calcutta, nor did he interact deeply with the residents of the region. Rather, he sourced nearly all the information he would draw upon from historical texts. These, he felt, were the truest embodiment of a culture and age's *zeitgeist*.<sup>19</sup> Beyond the merit an exegetical methodology has in and of itself – historical texts are, by nature of their age, very well suited to explain the past – this method is also a clear instantiation of the colonial de-valuing of local knowledge (along with the assertion that there was no history before the British): this was a methodology which did not require Jones to rely on Indians, and which gave him, through the constructed authority of the historicity of the documents with which he was working, the ultimate say on the past.

Approximately contemporary to Jones were the careers of the botanist physician Francis Buchanan and the cartographer Colin Mackenzie, in whom many have found another beginning for the archaeological discipline in India. Their monumental surveys, of Bengal and Mysuru respectively, were notable both for their use of scientific topography as well as their attitude that sites of historical interest and local folklore formed integral parts of a region's identity and deserved equal merit in what many others would have called a physical geographical endeavor.<sup>20</sup> Throughout their extensive travels in support of their surveys, both men would avidly draw,

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 208.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Guha-Thakurta, Tapati. *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2004, 31.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 10-11.

describe, and collect everything they deemed to be of interest, and the contemporary Western understanding of large swaths of Southern and Eastern India are due to their pioneering expeditions.

Both men, despite (and because) being actively engaged in the expansion of the Empire, shared Jones' ability to take the study the Indian past seriously. They differed rather significantly from Jones, however, in their methodology. Theirs was one that privileged quantity and thoroughness above all else. The way to understand India was to have seen it all, to have measured it all, to have drawn it all, and to have spoken to all the different castes of all the different regions.<sup>21</sup> It was also a methodology that sought to extract lessons about the contemporary and past essences of the country *from that which remains in the present*. Mackenzie and Buchanan were not interested in the literature, which is, in some ways, spared the true process of ageing, but in the ruins out in the jungle, which bare as much on the contemporary state of affairs as on the time of their creation. It was also a methodology in which the primary point of reference was geographical rather than cultural-historical.<sup>22</sup> Jones felt that the most illuminating interpretive frame for understanding India was to structure it based on language families, literatures, and dynasties, but Mackenzie and Buchanan were inaugural forces in the tradition that sought to map India before all else. They felt the British would only know India, and only control India, when everything about it could be securely placed in a cartographic context. Here, more so than with Jones, the imperial connection is extremely important. While Jones' work was always done with an eye toward understanding, these men worked for the East India Co., and it was the military who were the patrons and primary audiences of their surveys.

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<sup>21</sup> Dirks, Nicholas B. "Guiltless Spoliations: Picturesque Beauty, Colonial Knowledge, and Colin Mackenzie's Survey of India." In *Perceptions of South Asia's Visual Past*, 1st ed., 211–33. New Delhi: Oxford & IBH, 1994, 223.

<sup>22</sup> Johnson-Roehr, 509.

Indeed, Mackenzie was himself a colonel in the British army by the time he retired, and his geographical sensibilities and advice for artillery placement were indispensable in the British victory in the last Anglo-Mysore war in 1799.<sup>23</sup> These surveys were meant to fill in blanks on the British imperial maps with the newly conquered territories, these were not *explicative* expeditions but rather *informative*. The intention was to introduce and document rather than to understand and explain, and this, as we shall see, would have a profound impact on the ASI to come.

While separated from Jones in style, Mackenzie and Buchanan were united with Jones and the Asiatic Society in the desire for a total knowledge of India, Mackenzie having famously said the subject of his surveys was “all that could be seen and copied.”<sup>24</sup> They also shared a similar belief in the importance of British subjugation of the Indian continent, and in the emerging Orientalist orthodoxy that India’s best days were in its past. The admixture of these orthodox Orientalist positions and a collecting sensibility is best seen in the work of James Fergusson, who, after Sir William Jones, is perhaps the most important and influential figure in the Indological field.

## Elaborations: James Prinsep, James Fergusson, and a Case Study of the Durga Temple of Aihole

The common form of the history of the ASI moves from Sir William Jones to the figure of James Prinsep, who would become the secretary of the Asiatic Society in 1833.<sup>25</sup> He was also

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<sup>23</sup> Dirks, 213.

<sup>24</sup> Guha-Thakurta 2004, 11.

<sup>25</sup> “History.” Government. *Archaeological Survey of India*, 2011. [http://asi.nic.in/asi\\_aboutus\\_history.asp](http://asi.nic.in/asi_aboutus_history.asp). I emphasize that it is traditional to turn to the figure of James Prinsep not to demonstrate skepticism about his inclusion nor the value of examining his influence next. Rather, it is to emphasize in a Saidian way the internal consistency not only of the discourse about India and its past, but the meta-discourse about the discipline itself.

the editor of the Society's journal, and it for this secondary role that he would receive the multitudinous copies of inscriptions from around India with which he would make his monumental contribution to Indology: the modern decipherment of the Brahmi and Karosthi scripts. To quote his protégé James Fergusson on the magnitude of this achievement, with the decipherment of Brahmi, "a new era now dawned on Indian archaeology, and the thick crust of oblivion, which for so many centuries and covered and concealed the character and language of the earliest Indian inscriptions, ... was removed at once and forever by the penetrating sagacity and intuitive perception of James Prinsep."<sup>26</sup> While the contribution of Prinsep's work is difficult to adequately summarize, his legacy is largely confined to academics. That is, he left Jones' interpretative framework for the most part unrefined: he participated in the possession of the Indian past through a cultural frame and with a textual methodology (even if his emphasis was skewed toward the texts of epigraphs and coins rather than literature). It was his disciple, James Fergusson, and the way he would reinterpret lessons he learned from Prinsep that would leave a much larger mark on the field.

James Fergusson came to India, like many others, to join a mercantile establishment in Calcutta, and would go on to run his own indigo farm (the profits which would later allow him to return to Britain a rich man). It was while he was managing his indigo farm that his architectural interests would lead him to audaciously attempt to survey all the important architectural sites of

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Indeed, the rather uncritical way that the ASI maintains and espouses the Orientalist orthodoxy is one of the central tenets of this study.

<sup>26</sup> Introduction to ASI, *Four Reports*, as quoted in Guha-Thakurta 2004, 30.

India.<sup>27</sup> Between 1835 and 1842, Fergusson traveled the length and breadth of the Deccan peninsula sketching in painstaking detail every monument, temple, and remain he could find.<sup>28</sup>

For Fergusson, who was extremely concerned with *accuracy* and *truth*, the only way to properly convey the essence of a building was through meticulous and detailed illustration (and later photography).<sup>29</sup> Only direct sight of a monument allowed one to produce authoritative knowledge of it. This, very much like those of his Orientalist predecessors, was a methodological conviction that suggested the role of the scholar was not to interpret but to reproduce and convey the truth held within the object of study as seamlessly as possible. Fergusson's addition to this thesis was the emphasis on sight as the supreme way of knowing a site.

While many have read a colonial and acquisitive subtext into the expansive scope of the knowledge projects of the Orientalists, this connection was explicit for Fergusson. He felt that the best way to control the Indian continent – and as a firm believer in the principle of British supremacy as well as having profited significantly from the subjugation of India, this was indeed a priority for him – was through “the superiority of our knowledge and organization.”<sup>30</sup> His project, while not mandated by the East India Co. as were the surveys of Mackenzie and Buchanan, was self-consciously and willingly a part of the project of possessing India: the knowledge produced he hoped and expected would contribute to the subjugation. One can see the traces of this imperial intentionality in Fergusson's two main theoretical convictions.

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<sup>27</sup>The overwhelming ambition and scope of Fergusson's expeditions should at once place him in the lineage of Jones, Mackenzie, Buchanan, and Prinsep.

<sup>28</sup> Guha-Thakurta 204, 5. It is worth noting that this section of the paper cites Guha-Thakurta 2004 quite closely because of the diligence with which she cites Fergusson. The general conclusions about the ideological factors at play in Fergusson's work are not Guha-Thakurta's alone, however, and can also be found in Tartakov, Dirks, Chakrabarti, and even to some extent Keay.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 15

<sup>30</sup> Writing in the introduction to his first book, *Picturesque Illustrations*. As quoted by Guha-Thakurta 2004 14.



The first was, as he would call it, was the “inverted evolution” of Indian civilization.<sup>31</sup> While the idea was not his,<sup>32</sup> he systematized and elaborated upon the idea more than any of his contemporaries.<sup>33</sup> The general scheme was that Indian civilization, and its architecture, reached its height when Buddhism was still widely practiced in the land, and was on a continuous, gradual decline throughout the subsequent eras of Indian history. These eras were defined by a particular religious and racial mixture for Fergusson: Buddhist architecture of the first millennium BCE being associated with the pure Aryan race, northern Hindu culture was seen as a corrupted Aryan cultural form, Jain architecture was produced by the mixture of Aryans and Dravidians, and so on all the way down to “the traditions of the Tamil races at the southern extremity ... which are infinitely more imperfect than those of their northern neighbors.”<sup>34</sup> As becomes clear, the second primary theoretical frame at play was that of racial categories, and the general division of Indian cultural history into northern Aryan and southern Dravidian types. Again, Fergusson was not the one to come up with the idea, but because of the massive amounts of research and travel he invested in his conclusions, his work played a disproportionate role in authenticating these racial categories as truth.

Fergusson’s connection with the imperial project becomes quite important when analyzing these incredibly influential theoretical elaborations. It is difficult to understand proclamations such as:

whenever we meet with ... two specimens of any sort in the whole country ... if one is more perfect ... than the other, we may at once feel certain that it is also the more ancient of the two: and it only requires sufficient familiarity with the rate of downward progress to be enabled to use it as a graduated scale by

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>32</sup> As we have seen, Jones felt identically, even if he did not elaborate it to the same extent.

<sup>33</sup> Or predecessors or successors, for that matter.

<sup>34</sup> This line of argument follows Guha-Thakurta in pages 12-18 of *Monuments, Objects, Histories*. The Fergusson quote is also from the introduction to his *Picturesque Illustrations*.

which to measure the time that must have elapsed before the more perfect could have sunk into the more debased specimen,<sup>35</sup>

except as from someone who participated in and benefited from the subjugation of the people in question. Rather, it is quite clear that Fergusson is applying already conceived conclusions about Indian history to the sites he encounters, using the authority the discourse he is helping to create grants them. In this light, the value of studying the racially and imperially charged beliefs of the Orientalists becomes clear: it is because they are not just beliefs, but rather become crucial motivating factors behind the scholarship that they produce and, when that racially motivated scholarship becomes accepted knowledge, so too has racially motivated logic become an accepted logic. To underscore this point once more, and to demonstrate how ideologically motivated falsehoods can leave epistemological traces for generations, it is worth following Tartakov's narration of the "historiographic career" of the Durga temple of Aihole, which was first introduced to the West by Fergusson himself in 1866.<sup>36</sup>

The Durga temple was built by the Chalukya dynasty of Badami in the first quarter of the eighth century CE and fell out of active use around the ninth century with the fall of the Chalukya empire.<sup>37</sup> Fergusson, upon surveying the temple, was at once struck by the apsidal plan of the temple, which he took to be derivative of what he considered to be the earlier and stylistically more pure Buddhist *chaitya* halls.<sup>38</sup> James Burgess, traveling years later as the Archaeological Surveyor of Western India, would come to Aihole in the hopes that this temple could reveal clues about the lost structural *chaityas* (the only extant Buddhist *chaitya* halls were

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<sup>35</sup> *Picturesque Illustrations* as quoted in Guha-Thakurta 2004 17.

<sup>36</sup> Tartakov 18.

<sup>37</sup> Harle, J.C. *The Art and Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent*. 2nd ed. Pelican History of Art. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994. 175; and Panchu. Interview with Badami Caves Tourist Guide. In Person, November 30, 2016.

<sup>38</sup> Tartakov 18.

rock-cut).<sup>39</sup> Though Burgess would correctly identify the temple as Brahminical, and attempt an identification of the gods contained in the temple's various niches – naming Nrisinha, Mahesasuri, Varaha, Vishnu, Arddhanari, and Siva – his primary point of reference for analyzing the temple remained a Buddhist *chaitya* hall.<sup>40</sup> Henry Cousens, a lifetime officer of the ASI and dedicated scholar of Indian architecture, would be the next to come to the temple. In his report, he repeated Burgess's list of the gods depicted, but returns with even greater detail and at even greater length than Burgess to Fergusson's Buddhist analogy, speculating that the shape of the rafters and roof was meant to mimic the shape of a natural cave. Even the anti-colonial crusader A.K. Coomaraswamy, in writing about the temple, would devote the majority of his time to analyzing the peculiar nature of a flat-roofed apsidal hall (which he linked with Buddhism) with a tower (a feature he speculated was a later addition). Percy Brown, writing in 1942, would further Coomaraswamy's suggestion of a later addition by reverting to Fergusson's position that the temple had been initially Buddhist.

In 1961, almost a hundred years after Fergusson had first written about the temple, C. Sivaramamurti was the first one to notice that the accepted list of gods depicted was mistaken. Arddhanari is depicted nowhere in the temple. It was another six years until R.S. Gupte would include Harihara as the sixth primary god, finally completing the correct list. It was also only at this time that Western scholars began to acknowledge that there is substantial precedent for apsidal temple plans in the Brahminical temple tradition (Stella Kramrisch should be credited as the first Westerner to cite the identification of these plans in the Sanskrit text *Samayanganasutradhara*). Around this time, finally, in the discourse of Indian scholars and specialists of the region, the spectacular sculpture for which the temple is now famous began to

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 19

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

predominate. Among Westerners and generalists (both Western and Indian), however, the temple remained described first and foremost an interesting adaptation of a Buddhist plan to a Hindu temple.<sup>41</sup>

What becomes clear from this account is the rather insidious nature of the early scholars' ideological convictions. It is not true, of course, that Fergusson's disdain for contemporary Indian culture and deep identification with the imperial project was shared by all those that followed. It is true, however, that the scholarship produced by generations of scholars nonetheless repeated the damaging and incorrect assumption that Hindu art and architecture is derivative and inferior to the previously constituted and more pure Buddhist tradition. It is also important to note the way in which Fergusson's assumptions greatly constricted the type of knowledge produced about the site. Before attitudes were re-evaluated in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was very little appreciation of the Aihole temple's sculpture, very little analysis of what inferences can be made about the culture that constructed the temple, and, indeed, very little in depth discussion about very much at all beyond the building's footprint.<sup>42</sup> This is the dual value of interrogating the origins of contemporary knowledge about India's past: to reveal potential prejudices that inspire and inform it, and to reveal the contingencies that shape the scholarly discourse that follows sites.

Finally, it is interesting to note the way the ASI's history page describes the career of Fergusson. Rather than emphasize the problematic nature of his attitude toward India, rather than noting the misleading nature of some of his scholarship, the ASI includes Fergusson first on a list of people who "contributed enormously" to Indian scholarship, lauding his "extensive surveys"

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid 20.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 20.

and discoveries across the country.<sup>43</sup> These statements are all true; Fergusson is a giant in the field, and it is difficult to imagine what Indian archaeology would look like without his contributions. That is, though, *exactly* the point of the post-Orientalist interventions of the past four decades: figures like Fergusson and Sir Alexander Cunningham – an analysis of whom follows – have completely dominated what we know as archaeology, and it is necessary to imagine a field as without them. To imagine what scholarship would look like if orientalism were not so thoroughly ridden with imperialism. The uncritical and unquestioning lionization of previous scholarship leads to the reproduction of their impulses and a constriction of the discursive possibilities. Before the reflections of those impulses discernible in the present can be analyzed, however, it is necessary to continue the development of the ASI as an institution.

## Founding an Indian Archaeology

During the 100 years of British dominion in India, the government had done little or nothing towards the preservation of its ancient monuments, which, in the total absence of any written history, form the only reliable source of information as to the early condition of the country. ... Some of these monuments ... must soon disappear altogether, unless preserved by the accurate drawings and faithful descriptions of the archaeologists. ... Hitherto, the government has been chiefly occupied with the extension and consolidation of empire, but the establishment of the Trigonometrical Survey shews [sic] that it has not been unmindful of the claims of science. It would redound equally to the honour of the British government to institute a careful and systematic investigation of all the existing monuments of ancient India.

- 1861, Colonel Alexander Cunningham to Lord Canning<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Archaeological Survey of India. "History." Government. *Archaeological Survey of India*, 2011. [http://asi.nic.in/asi\\_aboutus\\_history.asp](http://asi.nic.in/asi_aboutus_history.asp).

<sup>44</sup> "Memorandum from Col. A. Cunningham of the Bengal Engineers to the Governor General, Lord Canning, Regarding a Proposed Investigation of the Archaeological Remains of Upper India," as cited in Guha-Thakurta 5.

The Archaeological Survey of India owes its existence to this memo and to the efforts of Sir Alexander Cunningham in general. Cunningham, who in his early days in India had been a coworker, confidant, pupil, and great admirer of James Prinsep, was a lifelong crusader for the systematization of the study of the Indian past, and is the subject of the last historical sketch.

His memorandum to Lord Canning is an excellent place to see the convergence of the multiple methodological and ideological convictions that have been traced so far. First, there is the clear disdain and mistrust of Indian literature and history as being rigorous and reliable sources of information on the past.<sup>45</sup> There is also an increasing acknowledgment of the need to preserve the physical heritage of the nation, although not for its intrinsic value, and certainly not for its presentation for the public, but rather because it had not yet been entirely documented. Finally, through the emphasis Cunningham places on the “accurate drawings and faithful descriptions” produced by a professional class he inaugurates as “archaeologists,” Cunningham takes Fergusson’s detail oriented empiricism to an extreme, situating the field as a peer the mathematical study and *measurement* of the Earth undertaken in the “Great Trigonometric Survey.”<sup>46</sup>

This memo was eventually approved by Lord Canning, and Cunningham was appointed as India’s first Archaeological Surveyor in 1861.<sup>47</sup> Over the next four years of nearly continuous travel, Cunningham would perform a tour of proportions similar to Fergusson’s travels decades before. Interestingly, however, this was not, as Fergusson’s was, a tour guided by local lore of

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<sup>45</sup> Cunningham also famously dismissed the *puranas* as being rubbish that reveal nothing about the Indian past. See Johnson-Roehr 510.

<sup>46</sup> Fergusson’s ideas on the ability of detailed descriptions and measurement to produce scientific truth should be easy to distinguish. Jones’ attempts at a rigorous and deep study of the Indian past is quite clear as well. Cunningham’s project was largely one of carrying on and expanding the legacy of his predecessors.

<sup>47</sup> Archaeological Survey of India. “History.” Government. *Archaeological Survey of India*, 2011. [http://asi.nic.in/asi\\_aboutus\\_history.asp](http://asi.nic.in/asi_aboutus_history.asp).

famous sites, nor were its destinations places that needed additional scholarship. Rather, Cunningham chose to follow the paths of two medieval Chinese Buddhist pilgrims, Fa Xien and Xuan Zang, hoping to identify each of the sites they visited and described, notably choosing to ignore thousands of years of Hindu, Muslim and Jain history that both pre- and post-dated the period of Buddhist influence in Northern India for the first five years he was in office.<sup>48</sup> These early pilgrim surveys were also notable for their similarity to those of Mackenzie and Buchanan. That is, Cunningham's surveys were in many ways geographic; his interest was not in analyzing the sites for the clues of the daily life of the civilization, it was not in learning more about the Buddhist mythology and iconography contained at each, but rather it was to confirm the sites place on a map, and to validate by way of stone what was contained in text.

Cunningham's work was cut short by the abrupt dissolution of the ASI by the Raj in 1866. After an interregnum of five years, Fergusson was named to the newly inaugurated post of Director General of the re-inaugurated Archaeological Survey, this time tasked with performing "a complete search over the whole country, and a systematic record and description of all architectural and other remains that are either remarkable for their antiquity, or their beauty or their historical interest."<sup>49</sup> Though Cunningham's work was much diversified in his second tenure, there was still a substantial bias toward the North and toward the ancient; toward, not surprisingly, the locations – temporal and physical – that had always been deemed by the British to be of higher quality and greater interest.<sup>50</sup>

Upon retiring in 1885, Cunningham recommended that the government do away with the position of Director General and reduce the ASI staff to less than 20 believing that, in the words

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<sup>48</sup> Johnson-Roehr 510.

<sup>49</sup> Archaeological Survey of India. "History." Government. *Archaeological Survey of India*, 2011. [http://asi.nic.in/asi\\_aboutus\\_history.asp](http://asi.nic.in/asi_aboutus_history.asp).

<sup>50</sup> Johnson-Roehr 510.

of the modern ASI (still working 130 years later), “the remaining work” could easily be done by a small organization.<sup>51</sup> Despite the reference to preservation Cunningham made in his 1861 memorandum, his recommendation makes clear that his chief objective was to bring the British to the state of total knowledge that had always been the objective of Orientalist research into India. That Cunningham thought he was near completion of the history of India after having surveyed almost entirely Buddhist and Gupta sites is yet another instantiation of his blatant disregard for huge swaths of territory and time.

Similarly to his predecessor, James Burgess, the subsequent Director General of the ASI would recommend a further paring down of ASI staff when he retired, leaving behind an organization with a staff of under ten.<sup>52</sup> Unsurprisingly, such a small organization could not cope with its workload, and the ASI effectively ceased to exist following the implementation of these recommendations.<sup>53</sup>

## The Modern ASI

In May of 1899, heeding the suggestion of scholars of the Royal Asiatic Society, the British Secretary of State would reinstate the Archaeological Survey of India with a new mandate, this time emphasizing preservation rather than excavation, a major shift in policy and perspective.<sup>54</sup> No longer would the ASI’s primary objective be to remove the secrets of India’s past from the ground. Now, they would make investments in the preservation of the past *for the future*. Inherent in this change is a certain democratizing impulse; the idea that the past has value beyond what is currently conceivable, that it is not enough to come to know/possess it, that the

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<sup>51</sup> Archaeological Survey of India. “History.” Government. *Archaeological Survey of India*, 2011. [http://asi.nic.in/asi\\_aboutus\\_history.asp](http://asi.nic.in/asi_aboutus_history.asp).

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*



remains of the past represent something more substantial than can be heralded for academic and political purposes, and, most of all, that people should be able to see them for generations to come.

In 1901, two years after the ASI's third reinvention, the new Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, who felt more strongly than any previous British ruler that it was the duty of the British, as the imperial power, to protect the remains of the Indian past, would appoint John Marshall, a 25 year-old archaeologist trained in Europe to head the ASI.<sup>55</sup> Both Curzon and Marshall were deeply influenced by the on-going Preservation movement in Europe, which emphasized that historical buildings were valuable to the present in so far as they were historical. This movement felt that to restore a building was to remove its seal of authenticity, and thus to ruin its value as a piece of history, and so it was the duty of governments and conservators alike to maintain built heritage exactly as it was "found," leaving it free from the polluting traces of the present.<sup>56</sup>

In 1923, Marshall would publish his landmark *Conservation Manual*, the first ever document delineating an official policy regarding archaeological sites. In it, Marshall would faithfully reproduce these Victorian sensibilities. It would henceforth be ASI policy never to restore a building for aesthetic purposes, never to endeavor to restore a building to its previous glory, but rather to prevent its further decline. To attempt to restore a building would be a fabrication of history, Marshall argued.<sup>57</sup> The manual, which was published as a monograph and

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<sup>55</sup> Sengupta, Indra. "A Conservation Code for the Colony: John Marshall's Conservation Manual and Monument Preservation Between India and Europe." In *"Archaeologizing" Heritage?: Transcultural Entanglements between Local Social Practices and Global Virtual Realities: Proceedings of the 1st International Workshop on Cultural Heritage and the Temples of Angkor, 2-4 May 2010, Heidelberg University*, edited by Michael Falser and Monica Juneja, 21-37. Transcultural Research - Heidelberg Studies on Asia and Europe in a Global Context. Berlin: Springer, 2013, 24.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>57</sup> Archaeological Survey of India. "Draft National Conservation Policy for Monuments, Archaeological Sites and Remains Protected by the Archaeological Survey of India," May 2013, 9-10. Marshall would add the significant caveat of living monuments to this Preservationist sensibility. The interesting implications of that distinction are, however, beyond the scope of this paper.

distributed to ASI officers around the country would elaborate these sensibilities with detailed descriptions of the kinds of work that were admissible (to preserve the structural integrity of a building, for example), and what precautions were necessary to take during restoration projects to ensure that the authenticity of the site was not impinged upon. This manual, thoughtful, thorough, and innovative, would continue to guide ASI policy until the adoption of a new official conservation policy in 2013, which was an attempt to modernize Marshall's convictions rather than to replace them.<sup>58</sup>

Under the leadership of John Marshall, the ASI would reach new heights in professionalism, documentation, scope of excavation and preservation efforts, and, finally, in 1906 it would finally be given an indefinite mandate by the Raj.<sup>59</sup> It was also during Marshall's tenure that the 6000 year old ruins of the Harappan civilization were unearthed, marking arguably the most dramatic upheaval to the understanding of the Indian past, and certainly the most dramatic since the work of Prinsep.<sup>60</sup> In 1928, Marshall gave up the position of Director General to pursue his research into the Harappan sites,<sup>61</sup> and was replaced by the first Indian Director General, Rai Bahadur Daya Ram Sahni.<sup>62</sup> Under Sahni and his immediate predecessors, the ASI would lose much of the momentum it had built under Marshall, and would once again fade into relative unimportance and obscurity.

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<sup>58</sup> Danve, D.S.. Interview with Ajanta Site Manager. In Person, November 17, 2016.

<sup>59</sup> Archaeological Survey of India. "History." Government. *Archaeological Survey of India*, 2011. [http://asi.nic.in/asi\\_aboutus\\_history.asp](http://asi.nic.in/asi_aboutus_history.asp).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> An indicative example of the aura of professionalism that was growing in the archaeological community. Knowledge about the Indian past had become well-enough regarded by this time to induce someone to give up a high title to better pursue it.

<sup>62</sup> Archaeological Survey of India. "History." Government. *Archaeological Survey of India*, 2011. [http://asi.nic.in/asi\\_aboutus\\_history.asp](http://asi.nic.in/asi_aboutus_history.asp). The significance of this transition is both difficult to ascertain – very little is written about Sahni's brief tenure – and beyond the scope of this paper. Further, the main thrust of the paper is that these nominal transitions of power between British and Indian nationals left the underlying systems intact, and so, given that Sahni achieved very little in his career, there is not much to note.

The mid-40s would see two major turning points in the history of the ASI. The first was the installation of Sir Mortimer Wheeler as Director General in 1944.<sup>63</sup> Wheeler represents the culmination of the movement toward the transformation of archaeology into an empirical scientific field that had begun with Fergusson and Cunningham: Wheeler, like so many others, was a military man, and brought that strict sense of rigidity and discipline to the archaeological field.<sup>64</sup> Through the creation of a field school at Taxila, Wheeler would inculcate an entire generation of Indian archaeologists with his sense of urgency about methodical and copiously documented trench digging using coordinates and balks; an emphasis on sound logical argumentation rather than interpretation; and the importance of maintaining stratigraphic relationships between layers of materials and remains.<sup>65</sup> The ‘Wheeler Method,’ as the conglomeration of his ideas and practices came to be known, is still taught in Indian archaeology departments and schools today.<sup>66</sup> Under Wheeler’s leadership, archaeology would once and for all pass into the realm of hard science, and the ASI would gain a national acclaim as an arbiter of truth in the decades following Wheeler that it has struggled to ever again attain.<sup>67</sup>

Of course, the 40s also marked India’s independence from Britain, a political change that marks a radical shift in the relationship between the ASI and the Indian past.<sup>68</sup> No longer are the producers of knowledge and the audience of this knowledge foreigners who, despite interest and benevolence, were nevertheless engaged in dominating and profiting from the domination of the people whose past was under investigation. Now, the ASI was of the people, and tasked with the

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<sup>63</sup> Chadha, Ashish. “Visions of Discipline: Sir Mortimer Wheeler and the Archaeological Method in India (1944-1948).” *Journal of Social Archaeology* 2, no. 3 (2002): 378–401.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 383.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 383-384.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid*, 396.

<sup>68</sup> At least ostensibly, that is.

task of creating and preserving a national history. Indeed, the first act of Parliament related to archaeological endeavors was a 1951 law that did little beyond altering criterion for protection by the ASI from those that are “of historical, archaeological or artistic interest” to those that are of “national importance.”<sup>69</sup> Although purely symbolic, this nonetheless represents an effort by the government to frame the work of the ASI in terms of the people, in terms of creating narratives around which the new country can rally, and to support the psyche of the people by connecting them with their (substantial) heritage.<sup>70</sup> This emphasis on the value of built heritage for the people would be expanded by the 1958 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, which remains the primary law governing the preservation and management of the past.<sup>71</sup> The AMASRA reiterates that the government’s primary responsibility with regard to the past is to preserve it, and gives the government (through the ASI) sweeping new powers to confiscate privately owned land and artifacts that are deemed to be of “national importance” as well as to punish those who mistreat these physical remains.<sup>72</sup> Particularly in the provisions regarding the confiscatory powers of the government, the AMASRA makes clear that even small objects and antiquities should be “preserved ... in public place[s]” so that people can engage with them.<sup>73</sup> In a similar vein, the government would go on a national campaign to improve access to sites of national importance in the 60s and 70s, building roads, amenities, and cutting admission costs.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Government of India. *The Ancient Monuments Preservation Act 1904*, 1904, section 2(1); Government of India. *Ancient and Historical Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (Declaration of National Importance)*, 1951, 1951, preamble.

<sup>70</sup> This attitude can also be clearly seen in the government’s 5-year plans. See Planning Commission “Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-2017): Faster, More Inclusive and Sustainable Growth.” Government of India, 2013. <http://planningcommission.gov.in/plans/planrel/fiveyr/welcome.html>, 391.

<sup>71</sup> Archaeological Survey of India. “History.” Government. *Archaeological Survey of India*, 2011. [http://asi.nic.in/asi\\_aboutus\\_history.asp](http://asi.nic.in/asi_aboutus_history.asp).

<sup>72</sup> Government of India. *The Ancient Monuments and Archeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958*, 1958.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, Section 26(1).

<sup>74</sup> Danve, D.S.. Interview with Ajanta Site Manager. In Person, November 17, 2016.

These actions and more largely represent a repudiation of the British management of India's past. Though the ASI and the Government of India explicitly maintains that the British were exceptionally important in spreading knowledge about and protecting the Indian past,<sup>75</sup> the slew of legislation and resources directed toward re-structuring the management of these denotes a significant shift in priority and an implicit acknowledgement that the British's involvement with the past, whether positive or negative, was self-interested.

The final alteration to the contemporary ASI and scheme of archaeological management came with the passage of an amendment to the 1958 AMASRA in 2010.<sup>76</sup> Lauded as an important expansion and tightening of the archaeological protection apparatus,<sup>77</sup> the 2010 amendment increases the penalties for violating the 1958 AMASRA, expands the protected zone around ancient monuments, creates a new enforcement agency separate from the ASI, and asks for a re-evaluation of ASI policy.<sup>78</sup> Notably, it also asks that the ASI have its subsections "obtain public opinion and invite suggestion or objection from the public ... for grading and classification of monuments and archaeological sites declared to be of national importance having regard to the outstanding universal value, the historical, archaeological and architectural value and such other relevant factors."<sup>79</sup> It goes on to list the seven categories of graduated importance into which monuments should be placed, beginning with Category 1 monuments that are inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage Site list of most importance, and going all the way down to "other monuments located in Urban/Semi urban [sic] limits and in the remote villages," a catch all

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<sup>75</sup> See the ASI's "History" webpage, as well as the preambles to both Ancient Monuments acts passed in the 50s.

<sup>76</sup> It was this amendment that spurred the creation of the 2013 rules mentioned above.

<sup>77</sup> Tripathi, Shaiaja. "Monumental!" *The Hindu*. April 28, 2010, sec. History and Culture.

<http://www.thehindu.com/features/friday-review/history-and-culture/Monumental/article16298184.ece>.

<sup>78</sup> Ministry of Culture and the Archaeological Survey of India. "Notification of the National Monuments Authority (Conditions of Service of Chairman and Members of the Authority and Conduct of Business) Rules, 2011."

Publication Notification. New Delhi: National Monuments Authority, August 23, 2011.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, Rule 6(1).

category for the sites deemed least important.<sup>80</sup> This is a rather significant step back from the inclusive and excited nationalism of the archaeological policies of the 50s. First, it codifies and institutionalizes the differential treatment of sites, implicitly condoning the neglect of sites that are deemed to be of little “historical, archaeological [or] architectural value.” It also steps back from “national importance” as the motivating factor in archaeological preservation and once again privileges international opinion – through UNESCO – in the relationship to the past. Given that even local scholarship is deeply affected by the imperial and racial convictions of early Orientalists, as we have seen, this decentering of the local in favor of the national and international scholar is also an invitation for the lingering effects of Orientalism. It was following these most recent changes that site visits to the Ajanta and Badami cave temple sites were performed, and, indeed, the traces of Orientalism, particularly as re-instantiated by the 2010 amendment, are quite clear to be seen.

### Aftereffects: Orientalist Scholarship, Badami, and Ajanta

The Ajanta Cave Temple complex, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is located in Eastern Maharashtra and consists of 30 rock-cut Buddhist cave temples excavated into the wall of a canyon standing some 250 feet above a horseshoe shaped bend in the Waghora river.<sup>81</sup> Of the 30 temples, five were constructed in a Hinayana phase occurring in the first and second centuries BCE, and the remaining 25 beginning in the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century CE and, according to the emerging scholarly consensus for about half a century after (though this was previously the subject of much debate).<sup>82</sup> The caves fell out of active worship well before the turn of the first millennium,

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, Schedule.

<sup>81</sup> Mitra, Debala. *Ajanta*. 12th ed. New Delhi: Director General, Archaeological Survey of India, 2003, 4.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 5-8.

and were absent from the known historical record until their re-introduction by the British in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>83</sup> Though their remoteness and relative disrepair hindered their acclaim for some time, the extent of the site, the substantial and exquisite surviving painting, the abundant sculpture, and the rapturous reviews of all of the early Orientalists to survey it eventually led to Ajanta being considered one of the jewels of the ancient Indian past.<sup>84</sup> The Ajanta complex was also one of the first ancient archaeological sites in India to receive restoration work,<sup>85</sup> and fears of losing the site were important in adding momentum to the preservation movement in India.<sup>86</sup> Even by the 1920s, long before much attention or resources had been given to preservation in India, roads had been constructed to the remote ravine, the temples had been cleared of debris, and much structural work had been done on the site.<sup>87</sup>

Due to the fragile (and quickly deteriorating) condition of the paintings, there has been significant investment over the past decades on the introduction of new preservation technologies and methods at the site. To reduce pollution, the parking lot was moved to be four kilometers away from the caves themselves (which are now only accessible through a bus service); to reduce humidity from heat, incandescent lights have been replaced by fiber optic cables which project light inside the caves but generate the light outside; and they have set new limits on the number of people that can enter a cave at any one time.<sup>88</sup> The site is impeccably maintained

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<sup>83</sup> Malandra, Geri H. "The Creation of a Past for Ajanta and Ellora." In *Perceptions of South Asia's Visual Past*, 1st ed., 67–95. New Delhi: Oxford & IBH, 1994, 67.

<sup>84</sup> Shrinivasrao, Shrimant Bhawanrao. *Ajanta: A Handbook of Ajanta Caves Descriptive of the Paintings and Sculpture Therein*. Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1932, e. See Malandra for an account of how it would achieve its acclaim in the eyes of the British. The reader should also discern the suitability of this site for adoration by the British: it fulfills the two important criteria of age and Buddhism.

<sup>85</sup> For reasons that are beyond the scope of this paper, the British had also devoted resources to the preservation and restoration of Mughal monuments.

<sup>86</sup> Danve, D.S.. Interview with Ajanta Site Manager. In Person, November 17, 2016.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid; Shrinivasrao, 3-5.

<sup>88</sup> Danve, D.S.. Interview with Ajanta Site Manager. In Person, November 17, 2016.

beyond these preservation measures as well. Every temple is staffed by a security guard enforcing the entrance limit as well as ensuring that people do not touch the paintings themselves. At the bus landing, there are shaded lawns and gardens with benches, a restaurant, and a clean and new bathroom facility. The path around that takes visitors to the caves is well-paved and well-maintained. It is, in short, clearly a site that is well funded, and aspires to fill its mantle as a site second-to-none in the country, “except probably ... the Taj Mahal.”<sup>89</sup>

The Badami Cave temples, a group of four caves excavated into a cliff overlooking the capital of the early medieval Chalukya dynasty, were constructed in brief succession in the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE.<sup>90</sup> Three of the temples are Hindu (two devoted to Vishnu, and one to Shiva), and one is Jain. The caves, particularly numbers one, two, and three, are all adorned with substantial and intricate sculpture, on a scale undeniably comparable in detail and ambition to Ajanta. The caves were once painted, but almost all evidence of the painting has been lost,<sup>91</sup> except in some parts of cave three. Badami, as the capital of the Chalukyan Dynasty, which remained powerful until around the ninth century, is also home to substantial ruins of fortifications, a sixth or seventh century water tank (that is still in use as a reservoir), and numerous structural temples.<sup>92</sup> Though the caves contain substantial, intricately detailed, and famously proportioned sculpture as well as scenes that are to be found nowhere else in India, the first substantial British survey of the site, by James Burgess in 1874, dismissed the temples as being of a collegiate level.<sup>93</sup> Paradoxically, Burgess, in the same report compared the site to Ajanta for the wealth of information its bas-

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<sup>89</sup> Mitra, 1.

<sup>90</sup> Panchu. Interview with Badami Caves Tourist Guide. In Person, November 30, 2016.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Banerji, R.D. *Basreliefs of Badami*. 2nd ed. Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India 25. New Delhi: Director General, Archaeological Survey of India, 1998, 2.



reliefs contained about Hindu mythology, acknowledging the thoroughness, detail, and remarkably legibility of the site despite its incredible age.<sup>94</sup> Not surprisingly given its Hindu nature and the disdain the future Director General showed for the site, the British ASI never took over or devoted any resources to the preservation of the Badami site. It was not until the campaign to protect and promote sites “of national importance” in the 1960s that the Badami site would come to be owned by the ASI.<sup>95</sup>

Despite the mid-century nationalistic movement, the contemporary management of the Badami site reflects the prejudices of the British. There are virtually no safeguards against the degradation of the temples – visitors are permitted to walk wherever they like within the complex, and the security staff to enforce respectful treatment of the site is much smaller than that of Ajanta, consisting of three guards between the four temples (which are separated by some 300 feet). Moreover, the ASI has produced almost no information whatsoever on Badami. While there is a bookstand selling the 12<sup>th</sup> edition of the Ajanta visitor guide (as well as numerous other specialized contributions) in front of the entrance, the ASI has not sanctioned a single full-length text on Badami since a 1928 volume detailing the bas-reliefs contained within. In an immediate sense, the disparity in attention and resources given to the two sites would have more to do with the 2010 amendment to the AMASRA which essentially sanctions the more favorable treatment of sites awarded UNESCO World Heritage status. This cannot be seen as apart from British Orientalism, however, as it is well documented that the epistemological legacies of the British – their prejudices and mistakes – are even better preserved in Europe than in India.<sup>96</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Panchu. Interview with Badami Caves Tourist Guide. In Person, November 30, 2016.

<sup>96</sup> Tartakov, 22.

regardless of the genealogies behind the UNESCO decision, the preference for Ajanta over Badami represents a privileging of international over national interest.

Indeed, in terms of “national importance,” Badami would seem to have an edge. It, along with the other temples in the heartland of the Chalukyan dynasty, was part of an age of experimentation that would synthesize the temple constructing tradition that is now seen all over India.<sup>97</sup> It is also a site that was in active (if sporadic and personal rather than institutional) worship until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and, finally, one that is still conversant with the traditions of the local population.<sup>98</sup> Yet, it is clear that the government of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century was never able to fully actualize its re-focused view of the Indian past, and the government of the 21<sup>st</sup> seems to no longer be interested in such a project. Instead, the sites remain comparatively valued, resourced, and written about in about the same extent as they were in the days of the British.

## Conclusion

In its simplest form, this study endeavors to offer an explanation for the relative imbalance of resources between two ornate examples of early medieval Indian cave temple architecture. It asserts that patterns one can discern in the present have long precedents in British scholarship and management of the Indian past.

The study is also a defense of a certain way of looking at the present. That is, of the value of interrogating the providence of ideas about the past specifically, but of all of knowledge in general. Why is it that we think the things we do? How did they become commonplace? What

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<sup>97</sup> Panchu. Interview with Badami Caves Tourist Guide. In Person, November 30, 2016.

<sup>98</sup> In the brief time that I was there, for example, I saw two different sets of parents teach their children about Hindu mythology using the sculptures on the walls.

were the other convictions of the people who came up with them? How does this affect the nature of the idea? This type of analysis can be brought to bear on nearly anything, and I hope to have done so successfully with the ASI here.

This study is not, however, meant to be a polemic against the ASI. Its importance as an organization is undeniable, and its efforts to make the Indian past legible to the public are laudable. It is also true, I know, that many of the colonial legacies one can detect in the current ASI – the fact that nothing has been written about Badami in almost a century, for example – can also be explained by way of budget shortfalls and the difficulty of efficiently running an organization with such an enormous mandate. I do not believe, however, that this pragmatic analysis and my rather more theoretical one are mutually exclusive; they are both true, and are relatively more or less important depending on the context. In the context of the academy, though, it seems to me the more theoretical analysis is the proper one. It seems to me important to show that there are so many more questions we could be asking, and so many more answers we might be discovering if we attempt to understand and then do away with the colonial legacies as I have tried to delineate them here.

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## Recommendations for Further Study

1. Obviously, this project came to have a rather pronounced emphasis on the past, and given more time, a more detailed study (and exposition of research already done) of the present situation of the ASI would make the argument stronger. In particular, speaking with officials in the ASI about their perspective on Orientalist scholarship would make the argument substantially stronger.
2. I do not touch on the rise of right wing Hindu fundamentalism whatsoever in this paper, but that is a fascinating development in the ideological (mis)use of archaeology about which much has been written and much more can be written. A development of this argument would have to take that very seriously, and, conversely, I believe the argument of the paper would put the rise of Hindutva archaeology in its proper perspective.
3. This paper also lacks a sense of the ASI in a global context of archaeology and preservation. Comparing the historical development of the ASI to Surveys in other parts of the world, particularly in the global north, would be extremely fruitful.



## Glossary

**Ajanta:** Perhaps the most internationally renowned archaeological site in India. A series of intricately carved and decorated Buddhist cave temples in Central Maharashtra constructed in two periods, the first in the second century BCE, and the second in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE.

**Archaeological Survey of India (ASI):** Created by the British Raj in 1861, the Archaeological Survey of India is the body responsible for protecting India's monuments, promoting further scholarship, and educating the public. It is currently housed under the Ministry of Culture.

**Badami:** A set of rock-cut Hindu and Jain temples in the South Indian state of Karnataka. The temples, built between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, are also intricately carved and decorated, but lack the vibrant paintings which have given Ajanta its fame.

**Discourse:** Used in the Foucauldian sense of the sum of writings, beliefs, and practices with regard to a particular topic which together create its boundaries, give it meaning, and assert particular truths about it.

**Ellora:** A set of rock caves from the 7<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> centuries CE that contain both Hindu and Jain temples as well as some Buddhist iconography. Located in the same region of Maharashtra as the Ajanta caves.

**Indology:** The field of Indian philosophy, art history, archaeology, and science. Essentially the area specific subfield of orientalism.

**James Prinsep:** A 19<sup>th</sup> century English metallurgist and scholar most famous for deciphering the Brahmi script – a contribution of utmost importance to the study of India's past. Also the founder of the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. A mentor to Alexander Cunningham and deeply influenced by William Jones.

**Lord Canning:** A 19<sup>th</sup> century English lord and Governor-General of India. He presided over the foundation of the ASI.

**Orientalist:** A term to describe Western scholars of the near and far east (the Orient). It has come to have pejorative connotations in the aftermath of Edward Said's *Orientalism*.

**Sir Alexander Cunningham:** A 19<sup>th</sup> century British army engineer. One of the founders of the Archaeological Survey of India, and a great scholar (and collector) of Indian history and antiquities.

**Sir William Jones:** An 18<sup>th</sup> century English jurist and founder of the Asiatic Society, the first organization to begin the systematic study of the Indian past. Although not an archaeologist himself, Jones was immensely influential in promoting a culture of serious and dispassionate study among the British.