

RESEARCH PAPER

Photographs and Archaeological Knowledge

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This article explores some of the ways in which photographs and their archives establish archaeological knowledge. It draws upon histories of photography and archaeology within South Asia to create focus upon archaeology's evidentiary regimes. The aims are to: a) demonstrate the importance of engaging with photographs and their archives as objects for reckoning archaeology's evidentiary terrains, b) draw attention to multiple social biographies a photograph or photographic archive acquires, c) highlight the visual as a force of archaeology's historiography, and d) impress upon the necessity of attending to historiographical issues. The aims allow us in seeing some of the ways in which field sciences create their evidentiary frames, and have a special resonance within the context of South Asian archaeology where professional and amateur archaeologists continue to promote the belief that archaeological facts exist out there, and that archaeological research produces better and more robust sources for the past than scholarship based on texts. Visual histories also highlight the mutation of the so-called 'colonialist' historiography within the post-colonial histories of archaeology's developments, and encourage us to go beyond the hackneyed formulations of colonial legacies and the hagiographic literature of individual practitioners.

Introduction

'In a world dominated by visual images the photograph has become almost invisible' (Clarke 1997: 11).

The above sentence with which the late photo-historian Graham Clarke began his book *The Photograph*, aptly describes the archaeological episteme, where too visual images dominate and where too the photograph remains almost invisible. Considering that archaeological knowledge is assuredly anchored upon the transcription of sight, as in field surveys and excavations, photography's intervention within archaeology's evidentiary terrain is expectantly profound. Yet, the distinguishing impact of photography vis-à-vis other technologies of visual encryptions on archaeological practices are often glossed over, and when they are not, it is to correct notions of visual verisimilitude (e.g. Shanks 1997). Despite the growing research on 'Visualisation and Knowledge formation in Archaeology' (i.e. www.viarch.org.uk), photographs are usually viewed as images, and grouped with lithographs, posters, cartoons, models, digital reproductions and other such 'visual images' for directing our attention to the fact that 'perception and representation are intimately related' (Watson 2004: 95).

The neglect of field-photographs within creations of archaeological knowledge has not meant that archaeologists ignore the phenomenological value of vision; quite the opposite. Over the last two decades the sensory experience of seeing has been creatively explored through research on landscape archaeology and the archaeology of

art and aesthetics, and vision has been theoretically contextualised in a number of ways to tease out its interventions within relationships between archaeological topographies and their inhabitants and creators (examples are the edited volumes by Molyneux 1997, Fejfer, Fischer-Hansen and Rathje, 2003, Brodie and Hills 2004, Renfrew, Gosden and DeMarrais 2004). The focus on visualisation within archaeology has derived much inspiration from the force of material culture studies, and this emanated from changing orientations in themes of enquiries during the 1980s within disciplines such as social anthropology, history of science, sociology and cultural history (see Buchli 2002, for examples of pioneering research). They in turn opened up new areas of archaeological research on 'visual essences' of past encounters (e.g. Frieman and Gillings 2007), legacies of 'embodied materiality' (e.g. Meskell 2005), and ontology of vision, including its status within sensory perceptions (e.g. Ouzman 2001).

The privileging of sight as a 'sense of reason' has also by now produced a fair share of criticism from archaeologists who study the visual, and explore the bias of a, western, historiography built upon Enlightenment's heritage (e.g. Hamilakis 2002, but see Poole 2005). Yet, despite the theorising, one finds that the growing intellectual thrust upon vision's performance within archaeological spaces (e.g. Wheatley 1995, Fontijn 2007; for South Asia see Shaw & Sutcliffe 2005), which includes investigations on the 'politics of vision' (Thomas 1993), nature of 'gaze' (e.g. Duncan 1993), and 'materialisation of culture' (DeMarrais 2004), overlooks, to a considerable extent, the ways in which the visual mediate within our selection of that which we promote as raw data from the field. The dictum 'to see, hence, to know', which promised antiquarian research the means

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of securing relatively objective histories from things, as opposed to from written records, is rarely appraised for the ways in which it has nurtured archaeology's evidentiary terrain. And an inevitable casualty of this neglect is the tendency of ignoring photography and photographs as makers of archaeological knowledge. In this respect although Michael Shank's ruminations of what photographs do within archaeology may come across as an early exception (*ibid*), they, in effect, illustrate the opposite, namely, the neglect.

Enunciating that 'photographs are powerful rhetorical instruments in establishing objectivity', Shanks had focused not on photographs but on *photoworks* (Shanks *ibid*: 3, italics his), which for him represent 'one aspect of how archaeologist may take up the remains of the past and work upon them' (*ibid*: 73). Hence, despite the fact that Shanks's article remains a pioneering synthesis of the research that had been undertaken on the 'cultural lives' of photographs until the late 1990s, his analysis effectively disengaged photographs from their physical forms. By emphasising upon the photographic iconography alone, Shanks greatly eroded photographs' saliency, reducing their epistemic value to something that, as he himself eulogised, 'cannot be encapsulated within verbal description' (*ibid*: 101).

However, as Deborah Poole was to demonstrate, the same year as Shanks's article was published, photographs, like most objects, acquire vastly different meanings through their myriad performative spheres. Through her research on the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century photographic practices in Peru, Poole showed that the domain of visual economy within which photographs circulated, and which shaped their production and consumption, was the 'cultural and discursive system' through which they 'are appraised, interpreted and assigned historical, scientific and aesthetic worth' (Poole 1997: 8–9). Although Poole's work anticipated Geoffrey Batchen's, who was to locate photographs within a 'social dimension [and] a dynamic web of exchanges and functions, that gives them a grounded but never static identity' (Batchen 2002: 78), Poole explained fully why 'it becomes important to ask not what specific images *mean*, but rather how [they] accrue value' (Poole 1997: 10). The need for understanding vision's material intervention within the framing and sustenance of discursive regimes, which she emphasised, calls for an approach to photographs not as *photoworks* but as artefacts.

In recent years, the nascent historiography that engages with the social and cultural lives of nineteenth-century archaeology has taken some cognisance of the epistemic shifts induced by photography and described by Walter Benjamin as transforming the dominance of the auratic to that of the non-auratic (e.g. chapters in Smiles and Moser 2005). Photography is received in one such history as enabling the 'archaeological metaphor', and photographs as establishing the semantic grounds for experiencing the past (*ibid*: Bohrer's article: 184). By giving meaning to the idea of excavating an imagination, the art historian Frederick Bohrer has developed a metaphor of archaeology, which according to him is expressive of the

human mind in its questions and probing. He reigns in photography within this metaphor by pitting experiential responses that are elicited in our engagements with the visual and material, and excavates the value of photography 'for going beyond (and beneath) an artifact's superficial appearance in order to capture what is deemed most valuable in it' (*ibid*).

A brief foray of the photographic creations of archaeological realities in this article, one hopes, would offer some possibilities of gauging the tactility of such metaphors and experiences that are being increasingly used for discerning relationships beyond that of mere perceptions and representations between photography and archaeology.

Visual Memory: Photography and Archaeology

By the beginning of the twentieth century the embrace of visual memory by the newest of the new Victorian 'descriptive science' of archaeology was rather well enunciated by Mathew Flinders Petrie. In his seminal publication on *Methods and Aims in Archaeology* (1904) Petrie had remarked that 'of all inherent material qualifications there is perhaps none more essential to a digger than this permanent picture of a site. And in the transient memory of day to day should include the appearance of every hole on all sides, the meaning of it and the purposes for which it is being dug' (Petrie 1904: 19).

Petrie's instructions for 'the orderly arrangement of the material in plates' within archaeological publications (*ibid*: 115–6) remains a classic example of the crafting of visual memory for showcasing the quality of archaeological data, and creating a unique identity for archaeological undertaking. Such creations of memory have continued to remain vital within archaeology's disciplinary history throughout the twentieth century.

As the *Excavations in Cranborne Chase* by General Augustus Henry Lane Fox Pitt-Rivers, or Pitt Rivers, clearly demonstrate, the use of photographs in excavation reports involved placing the readers in 'possession of all the facts and materials' (to quote Petrie 1904: 114). Pitt Rivers was adamant that 'every details should ... be recorded in the manner most conducive to facility of reference, and it is ought at all times to be the chief object of an excavator to reduce his own personal equation to a minimum' (1887: xviii). His excavation photographs and their captions (e.g. plate 255, 1898: facing page 80) elucidate the many ways in which the reader was made to focus on those aspects of a dig which the excavator wished him to see.

Throughout the twentieth-century, through maps, drawings and photography archaeologists have continued to emulate Petrie's views that excavation reports should show clearly that the 'author's conclusions are only a co-ordination, presented to enable the reader to grasp the material, and to feel clearly the effect of it on his sum of idea. For, 'plates and texts is to show the meaning and relation of the facts already expressed by form' and therefore, 'the orderly arrangement of the material in plates is the first duty [of the report writers]' (Petrie *ibid*: 114–5).

Considering that archaeological practices have always involved the recovery of a non-present past, the creation of visual memories through methodologies of field

photography, have proved to be the most potent means of attributing visible realities for non-visible phenomena. Histories of photography's 'disturbance', to quote Roland Barthes (2000 [1980], p. 12), within expositions of archaeological evidence also reveal the constituents and shifts in archaeology's evidentiary domains. Yet, the truism that neither texts nor things exist as historical facts out there is an understanding that is often repressed by archaeologists of South Asia, who often clamour for the disciplinary value of their subject as a 'truth-making' science. Indian archaeologists for example continue to build upon the value of that which they distinguish as 'archaeological sources' in terms of crude relativisms—of the superiority of field-based investigations over text-based research in sourcing historical truths (e.g. Chakrabarti 2006: 475). By illustrating some of the ways in which photographs and photographic archives are used for fixing archaeological knowledge, we are able to reflect on the ways in which 'hard archaeological facts' are produced through memorialisations of contingent meanings.

The archives of the nineteenth- and early-twentieth century archaeologists often provide a feast for the eyes in terms of their sheer visual exuberance. Beautiful drawings of the explored landscapes, and of 'things' collected and found, inundate them. With respect to the history of South Asian archaeology, the letters of Alexander Cunningham (1814–1893), John Marshall (1876–1958), Stuart Piggott (1910–1996) and Mortimer Wheeler (1890–1976), demonstrate the thrust of visuality for decoding meanings for things 'unknown' or deemed as 'wrongly known'. John Marshall's drawing (fig. 1a) is an important source for reckoning the ways in which numismatic scholarship was, and continues to be, developed. His letter to R. B. Whitehead, with a drawing of the Greek head was to dispute the latter's identification of it on a coin as depicting the king Menander. Piggott's letters from India (fig. 1b) to his then wife, Peggy, are graphic descriptions of a terrain he had begun to explore during 1943 during his War posting. The images of India he drew and imbibed, especially of the social hierarchy, rituals and rural economy were to subsequently shape many of his inferences of prehistoric Europe.

Visual histories and South Asian archaeology

The logic of seeing and knowing which informed antiquarian scholarship served the British in their framing of India's civilisational history. The force of vision remained, for approximately two hundred years an important vector within British negotiations of the antiquity of a land whose 'civil history' they found to be, to quote the early orientalist Sir William Jones, 'a cloud of fables' (1788: 421). Vision performed the same tasks as those that were delegated to historical enquiry by the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century antiquaries in Britain and Continental Europe, namely 'to separate falsehood from truth, and tradition from evidence, to establish what had probability for its basis, or to explode what rested only on the vanity of the inventors and propagators' (Archaeologia 1770: i). The antiquarian eye, which was nurtured by the on-the-spot drawings and paintings of things Indian by

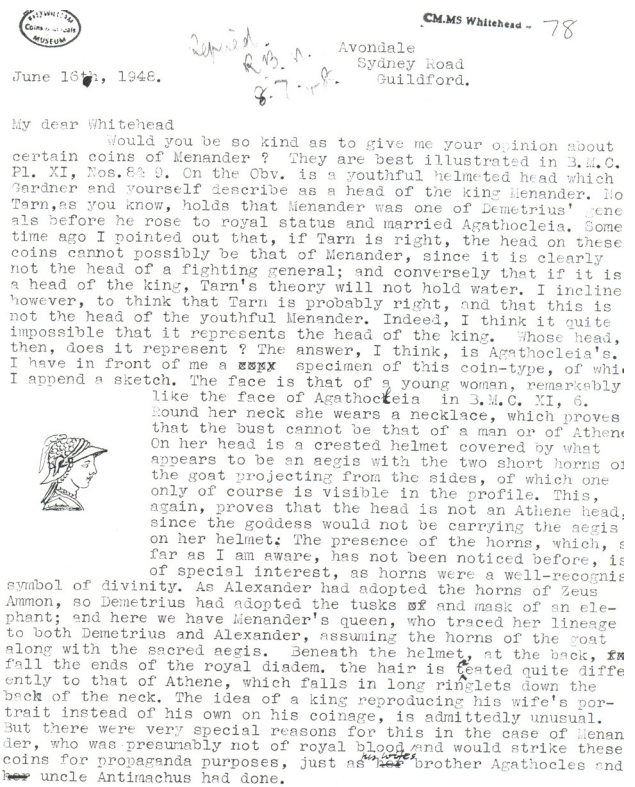


Fig. 1: a) Letter, Sir John Marshall to R.B. Whitehead (16 June 1948), courtesy Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

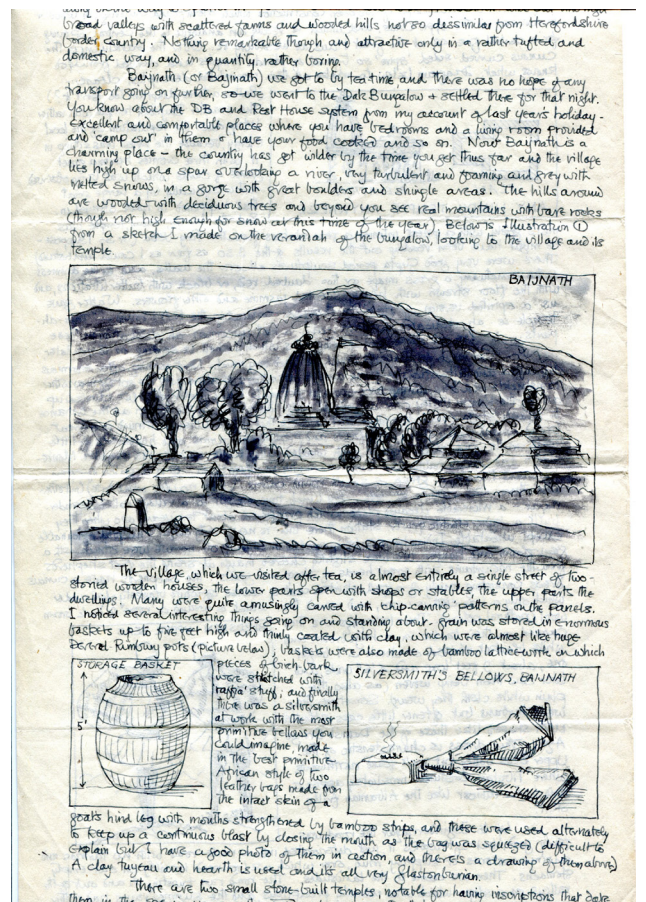


Fig. 1: b) Letter, Stuart Piggott to Peggy, 5 October 1943, Air Headquarters, New Delhi, India, courtesy, Archives of the Institute of Archaeology, Oxford.

the European travellers since the sixteenth-century, was rather well developed by late eighteenth-century within the picturesque 'views' of the cities and towns on the river Ganga and in Central India that were drawn and painted by William Hodges. Hodges was the first, British, professional painter to visit Hindustan, between 1780 and 1783. And in his introduction to his retrospective travelogue (1793) he explicitly stated that his sketches and paintings were 'plain observations, noted down upon the spot in the simple garb of truth without the smallest embellishment from fiction, or from fancy' (Hodges 1793: iv). This representational logic was to root photography's launch of archaeological practices within India, mainly from the 1850s, and initially for documenting India's architectural heritage.

The aesthetics of the sublime, which Hodges's drawings are potent expressions of, permeated antiquarian views, especially in the manner in which antiquaries received their objects of study. The Scottish antiquary, Hector McNeil's description of the caves of Kanheri and Elephanta (near Bombay), which he saw in 1783, elucidates this integration rather clearly. Macneil wrote: 'be this as it may, the grand cave of Cannara must ever be considered by the man of taste as an object of beauty and sublimity, and by the antiquary and philosopher as one of the most valuable monuments of antiquity. ... Indeed, were I desirous to spin out my description, the cave of Elephanta might furnish ample food for the most ravenous antiquary. Every part teems with human forms; every wall seems to move with life obedient to the will of the artist, who seems *Saxa movere fono testudinis, et prece blanda, Ducere quo vellet*' (1786: 260, 275). Although ignored as being of relevance to histories of antiquarianism within South Asia, particularly those that are written by archaeologists today, this rooting of visual aesthetics within antiquarian scholarship is of importance for gauging some of the ways in which archaeology appropriates dominant modes of visibility to create evidentiary terrains.

Photographs and 'Indian' archaeology

The overlapping realm of the visual and archaeological evidence strongly resonate within the two quotations that were printed on the title page of each of the twenty-three reports of the Archaeological Survey of India, which document the field surveys of Alexander Cunningham (Director and Director General of the Archaeological Survey from 1861–65, and 1871–85 resp.) and his staff between 1862 and 1885. They are a phrase from the Governor General of India, Lord Canning's speech on the eve of the institution of the Archaeological Survey in 1861, enunciating his government's archaeological programme that 'what is aimed at is an accurate description, illustrated by plans, measurements, drawings, or photographs, and by copies of inscriptions, of such remains as most deserve notice, with the history of them so far as it may be traceable, and a record of the traditions that are preserved regarding them'. This quotation was placed above the implorations of James Prinsep in 1838, as the Secretary to the Asiatic Society of Bengal, that 'what the learned world demand of

us in India is to be quite certain of our data, to place the monumental record before them exactly as it now exists, and to interpret it faithfully and literally.' When read together as they were meant to be, the quotations draw our attention not only on the emphasis that was placed upon seeking historical truths through archaeological surveys, but also on the accuracy of presenting this work visually. With respect to procedures on excavations, especially while they were in progress, the amateur archaeologists of nineteenth-century India, such as Robert Sewell who excavated the stupa of Amravati in 1877, felt the need for the presence of a draughtsman and photographer 'on the spot'. The 'one', as Sewell was to remark, 'to take measurements, and mark the position of every marble as it comes to light; the other to stamp in permanence the general progress of the work in all its different stages, as well as to afford accurate information on the position of those stones which remain *in situ*' (1880: 8; see Guha 2010 for more details).

The manuscript, seemingly in Sewell's hand, on the reverse of a photographic folio made up of photographs pasted in a series to establish a panoramic view of the stupa site at Amravati reads: 'this is a photograph of the complete circle of the middle of the circular mound, which is all that remains of the Buddhist stupa at Amravati on the river Krishna. It was taken section by section from the centre of the circle, just after the undersigned's excavation in 1876' (Fig. 2). Although an accompanying note casts the authorship and the date of the photographs in doubt—as it alerts to the fact that the photographs may have been taken by John Kelsall during the Duke of Buckingham's excavations at Amravati in the 1880s—the inscription adds to the scroll's value as an accurate transcription of the field. Such transcriptions of the physical tasks undertaken during the clearance and excavations of sites were consciously endeavoured from the middle of the nineteenth-century onwards through drawings, water-colours and other forms of manual illustrations, often made with the aid of cameras *obscura* and *lucida*, and they enunciate the eighteenth century antiquary, William Stukeley's injunctions that 'without drawing or designing the Study of Antiquities or any other science is lame and imperfect' (quoted in Piggott 1978: 1).

Within the Indian subcontinent as much as outside it, the genealogical lineage for photographs that came to represent the face of a professionalized archaeology by the mid-twentieth century are the nineteenth-century drawings which direct the eye to objects found *in situ* under the earth's surface. Although sketches of the geology of the excavated soil strata abound within the nineteenth-century mining and prospecting accounts of India, depictions of artefacts embedded within the soil stratigraphy are best represented within the corpus of drawings (of cromlechs, dolmens and stone circles) created by Philip Meadows Taylor, who undertook archaeological explorations of the Hyderabad State, between the 1830s and the 1850s (Fig. 3). The precision with which Taylor delineated his archaeological finds, distinguish his sketches from those of his peers, but although Taylor was a talented

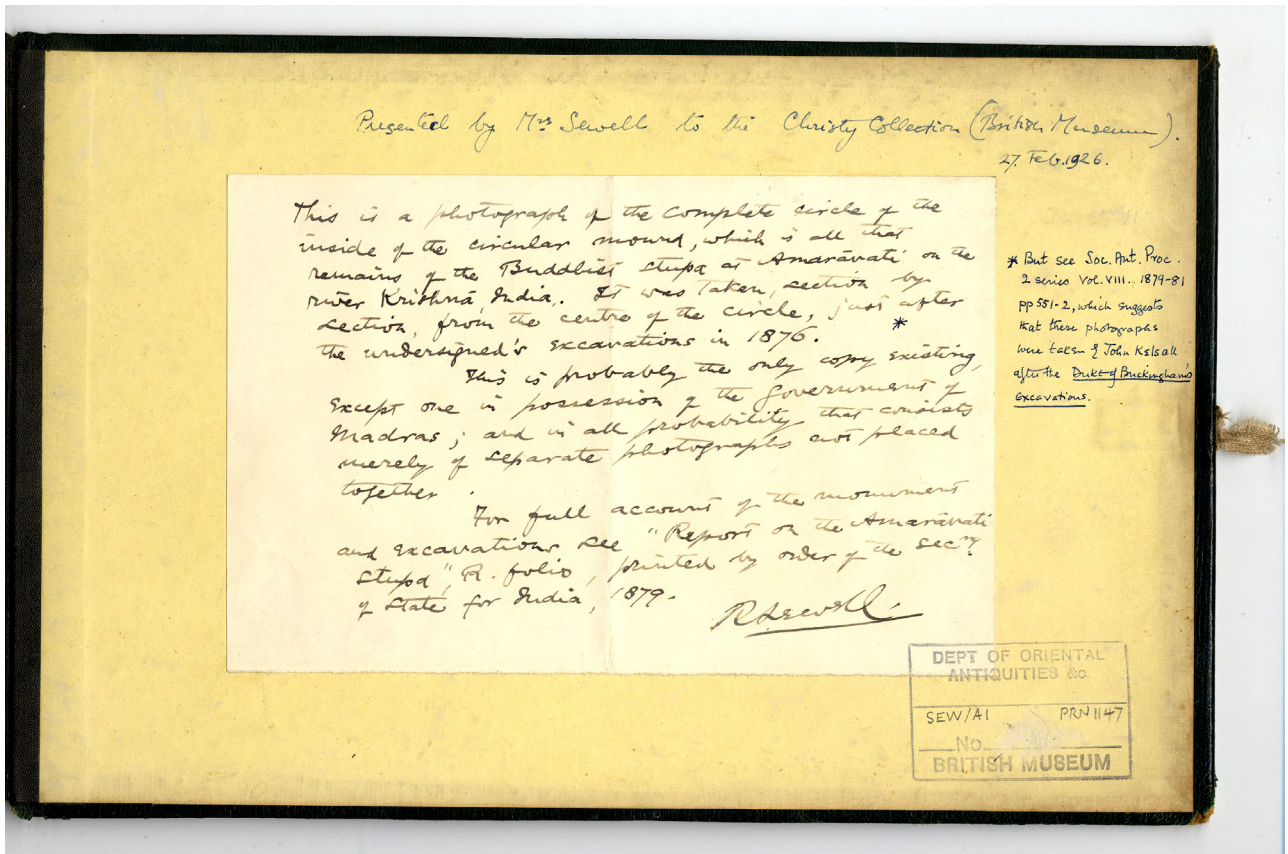


Fig. 2: Note on reverse of folio with twelve albumen prints for panoramic display of the stupa site, Amravati, ca. 1870s–1880s, courtesy The British Museum.

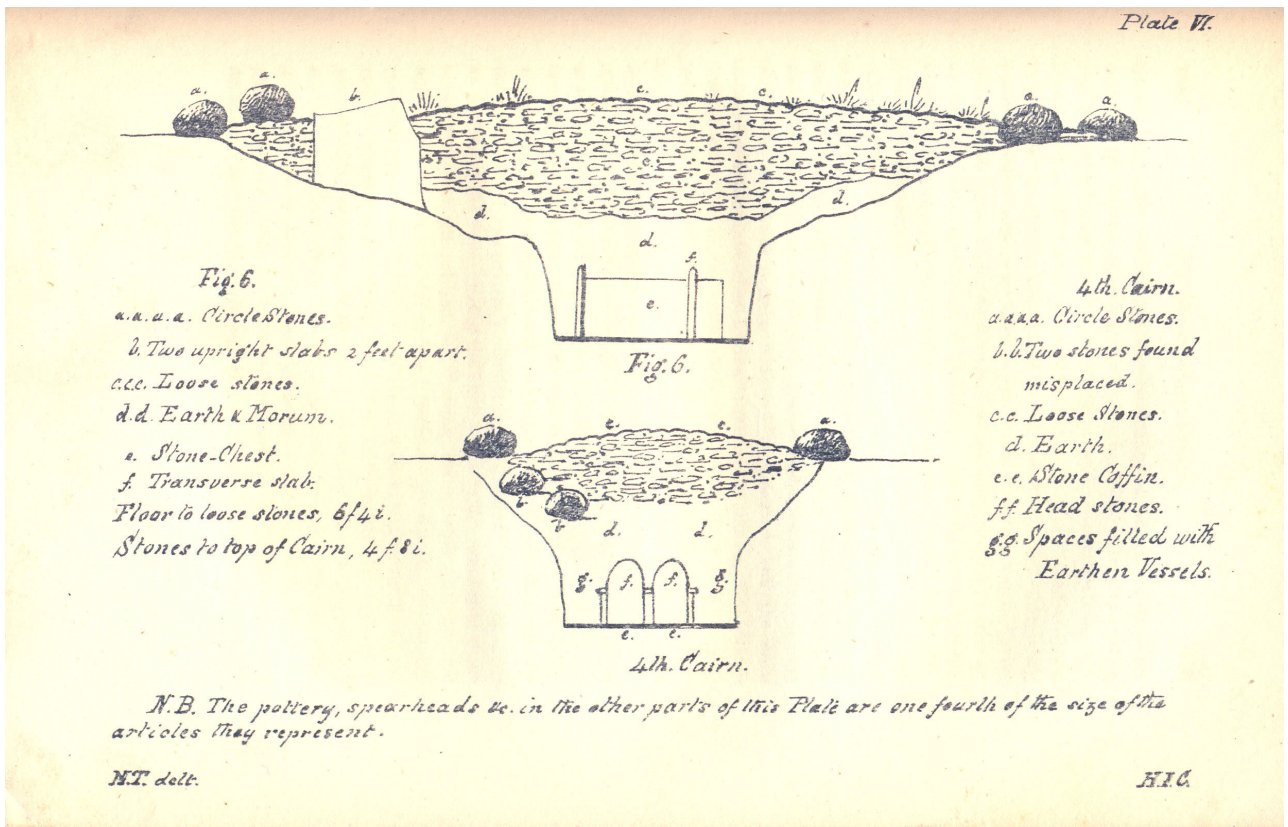


Fig. 3: Drawing, section through large 'cairn' (megalith) excavated near Jiwarij, Meadows Taylor, ca. 1849–50, (Plate 6 in Taylor 1851).

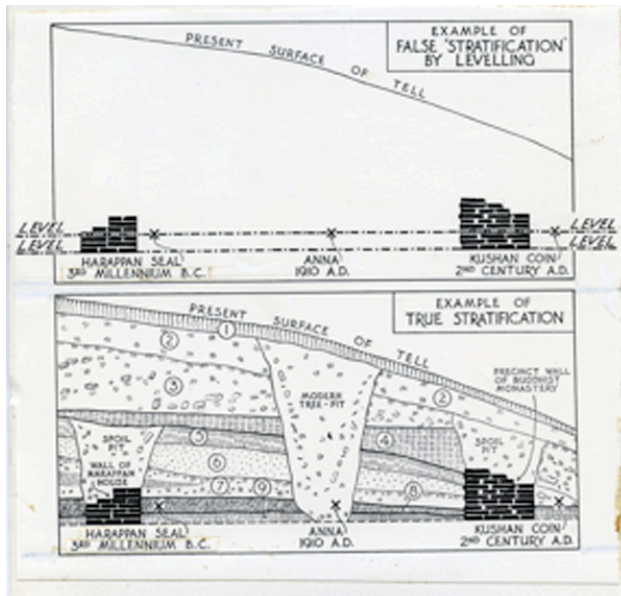


Fig. 4: Wheeler showcasing the flaws of his predecessors; Drawing published as 'Illustrating the stratification of a city mound (below) and the fallacy of recording mechanical levels (above)' in Wheeler 1956, Figure 11.

painter, having learnt to paint in India in 1825, neither he nor the archives that refer to him offer any information regarding where he had learnt to dig.

Not surprisingly, Taylor's initiatives in conveying the precision of his work visually, was lauded more than a century later by Mortimer Wheeler, the last Director General of the colonial Archaeological Survey (1944–48), who flaunted his own archaeological ventures in India as heralding proper methodologies and correct techniques for the performance of archaeological fieldwork. Wheeler resuscitated Taylor was the only proper archaeologist of South Asia, whose practices he felt could be emulated. For Wheeler, Taylor remained the first 'to hint implicitly at the true function of the excavator and recorder', who 'drew and described sections which preserve an informative and convincing record of what he found.' Therefore, with reference to the 'monumental sketches' of sections exposed at Harappa, cf. **Figure 4**, which were published by the Archaeological Survey of India in 1940, Wheeler was to comment that 'it is sad to compare these caricatures of science with the admirable sketch-records of Meadows Taylor nearly a century earlier' (Wheeler 1956: 23 and 34). Wheeler's reception of Taylor's sketches highlights the conceptual watersheds that images of excavations have forged in distancing the professional from the profane

In depicting methodologically perfect archaeological excavations the camera's inability in censoring the seepage of 'incidental details' through its lenses would resonate on the photographic record, to use Elizabeth Edwards phrase, as 'raw histories' (Edwards 2001). Throughout the twentieth-century, efforts at constraining the leakage of details have added to formulations of methods regarding the requirements of archaeological photography. They are rather well document in Wheeler's friend and photographer, M.B. Cookson's injunctions that 'no amount of

mechanical skills [was] a substitute for the careful preparation of the subject.' Rules for archaeological photography were developed well before Cookson's and Wheeler's time, and bespoke of the correct ways of showing-off the subject of photography, correct choices in selections of photographic equipment and of the correct manners in developing, processing and publishing techniques. However, by insisting on the splicing of excessive details from the photographic framing of 'orderliness and accuracy', Wheeler, unlike Petrie documented archaeology's growing disciplinary concerns in inducing the 'camera to tell the truth' (Wheeler *ibid*: 200).

Yet, despite attempts at taming the technology, photography's 'analytic mobility', which has been succinctly characterised as its innate capacity for scrutinising objects with limited visual access (Pinney 2010: 200), has always presented archaeologists, before and after Wheeler, with vast opportunities for refashioning their transcripts of transparency; both of their own work, and that of the past they unearth. As histories of consumption and circulation of photographs would amply testify, visible realities of the material world are constantly recreated by inflections of meanings of photographs' indexical contiguity. Within British India, some of the best and early examples are the biographies of photographs of the 'Hindu' city of Banaras.

The first planned archaeological excavations within the Indian subcontinent were undertaken at Sarnath, near Banaras, during the 'cold' seasons of 1834–35 and 1835–36 by Alexander Cunningham. They explicitly demonstrate that British archaeological enquiries of India's ancient past did not begin with grand discoveries, but with prising open the material contents of Buddhism (on this Guha 2012). The archaeological surveys of Banaras during 1863–'64 by the Christian missionary Matthew Attmore Sherring (and Charles Horne, a judge of the city), and Cunningham's seminal paper on archaeology's uses in the *Benares Magazine* (1848) also reveal, contrary to all recent histories of South Asian archaeology (e.g. Singh 2004, Guha-Thakurta 2004), that those who committed themselves to 'Buddhist archaeology' during the nineteenth-century hoped for the success of 'future prospects [in] endeavours to convert the heathen of all denominations [within India] to the religion of Christ' (Cunningham 1848: 92). As the caption for **Figure 5** illustrates, photographs were used for filling in the archaeological narratives of an absent Buddhist presence within the topography of this holiest of all the Hindu *tirthas* (pilgrim place), and for establishing a scopic regime which 'when looking upon these extensive ruins [could not] fail to recall the time when they were frequented by crowds of priests and disciples of the Buddhist faith' (Sherring and Horne 1865: 11).

The truth-values of the archaeological discoveries of Banaras's past were affirmed through renegotiations of photographic meanings. For example, the *Royal Photographic Album of Scenes and Personages Connected with the Progress of H.R.H. The Prince of Wales*, which was created by the commercial studio Bourne and Shepherd for the Prince (later Edward VII) and Princess of Wales when they toured India in January 1876 included views of



Fig. 5: Captioned 'The remains of a Buddhist shrine consisting of four handsomely carved pillars, standing on an ancient platform, with the usual Singhasun facing to the east', Muslim Graveyard, Bakariya Kund, Banaras, ca. 1863–4, photographer H.L. Frazer, lithograph, plate 2 in Sherring and Horne 1865.

'Aurangzeb's mosque' and the *ghats* of Banaras. Worthy of note is the letterpress that accompanies the photograph numbered 14, taken by Samuel Bourne (Neg no. 1187, Asia Pacific and Africa Collections, British Library), which affirmed:

'Nevertheless, Benares is not of very ancient fame as a Hindu city. All its early religious celebrity is derived from Buddhism, which supplanted or overshadowed Brahmanism in the greater part of India for nearly a thousand years. No doubt Brahmanism obtained in the district of Benares, as elsewhere in India, when Sakya Muni (Buddha) began his preaching there; but there seems an entire absence of evidence (whether of written record or the sometimes more trustworthy one of stone and brick) that Benares enjoyed any religious pre-eminence in pre-Buddhist days. It was Buddhism, and the splendid colleges or monasteries belonging to that faith, which gave celebrity and sanctity to the district which Brahmanism inherited after the expulsion of the Buddhist.'

The above memorialisation of a Buddhist Banaras through photography and photographs of a mosque and the

'Hindu *ghats*' (steps leading to the river) is indeed noteworthy for exploring some of the ways in which photography has served Indian archaeology.

Collections of 'archaeological' photographs

The curatorial impulse for the establishment of coherent collections provides a more direct understanding of the nexus between photography and archaeology for understanding the kinds of reciprocities and exchanges that occur within professionalisation of knowledge, flow of information, and nascence of disciplinary domains. With respect to the British archaeology of India, two very distinctive archives of photographs inform of the shifting parameters of archaeological research as a specialist domain. One was established in 1869, and remains at present in the British Library (London, Asia, Pacific and Africa Collection). This archive represents some of the earliest photographs of historical architecture, which were taken during the 'listing' of monuments, and characterises the nascent archaeological documentation projects that were undertaken within South Asia, between the 1850s and the 1880s. It presents the work of the vast array of amateur and professional photographers and informs of the early history of photography in India, which was launched at Calcutta in 1840 (**Fig. 6a**). The other, established in 1904,



Fig. 6: a) Asokan Pillar at Firoz Shah Kotla, New Delhi, Albumen print, Friths Series, ca. 1870, courtesy Alkazi Collection of Photography.



Fig. 6: b) Albums newly bound, representing the DGA's photographic collection, Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, September 2010.

showcases the work of the Archaeological Survey, which was re-instituted and re-organised for the third time in 1902, under the leadership of John Marshall. This remains a growing archive, and continues to be added to annually (**Fig. 6b**).

The architectural-cum-photographic documentation of pre-colonial India, which was mooted by the East India Company in 1847 as its 'Great Objective', and which was undertaken in a desultory fashion throughout the 1850s, was officially confirmed as the seminal archaeological policy of the Raj nearly twenty years later. In 1867, follow-

ing the Secretary of State, Sir Stafford Northcote's injunctions, the Government of India issued an official circular to the local governments with instructions to prepare lists, accompanied by photographs, of all historical buildings within their jurisdiction. The circular augured the report on the *Illustration of the Archaic Architecture, & c., of India*, which was submitted to the government in 1869, on the eve of the first re-institution of the Archaeological Survey of India in 1871. Ostensibly predicated upon the desire for establishing 'truthful delineation of structures of every description' through photographs, drawings, plans, sections, models and casts, the report prescribed the types and sizes of photographs to be made, the ideal vantage point of photographing buildings so that 'the operator [took] his views from the points best calculated to ensure results of value', and the creation of duplicate photographic sets, one to be forwarded to the India Office, London, and the other to be retained in India, although with the strict injunction that 'the negatives in all cases were to be sent to London' (Forbes Watson 1869: 1). Yet, despite the prescriptive onus on the correct gauging of the 'field' for the production of accurate field records of India's architectural history, the latter was to all extent pre-ordained through an essentialist classificatory scheme of 'Hindu' and 'Muhammedan' monuments. This binary classification was quite firmly in place by the 1850s, and was further allowed to develop through archaeological fieldwork. The eyewitness accounts of the archaeological field transcribed through photography and photographs, made substantive contributions to the notoriously inaccurate histories of the origin and uses of many temples, stupas and mosques.

The reasons for the creation of the photographic archive in 1869 were vastly different from those of the exclusive DGA's (i.e. Director General of the Archaeological Survey) Photographic Collection that Marshall was to install in 1904 at the Survey headquarters in Simla (for details see Guha 2010, pp. 145–152). The tone of functionality that Marshall adopted regarding the collation of its contents was remarkably different from Forbes Watson's. While the latter believed that the collection of photographs, plans and drawings of Indian monuments 'will probably constitute the most valuable work on art produced in the present century' (Forbes Watson 1869: 1), Marshall did not wish the photographs to be 'viewed as a single artistic whole' (Marshall 1904: 13). Rather, he created the archive to showcase the work undertaken directly by his, namely, the Director General's, office. The photographs, whose three decades of curatorial history, between 1904 and 1934, can be gleaned from the 'Proceedings' of the Archaeology and Epigraphy department and the Survey's annual reports, were printed to select sizes, mounted, usually, two to a page, placed within albums, and annotated on the reverse with corresponding negative numbers, official stamps, and location details (**Figs. 7a, b**).

The Object that is a Photograph

Although unique in terms of their contents and biographies, the DGA's Photographic Collection compares in one significant way with the Haddon Photograph



Figs. 7: a) Album page and reverse of photograph from excavations at Mohenjodaro, 1925–26 (A.61.HRG), Courtesy MAA.



Figs. 7: b) Album page and reverse of photograph from excavations at Mohenjodaro, 1928–29 (P.15927.HRG), Courtesy MAA.



Fig. 7: c) Photographs mounted on card and annotated within custom made drawers representing the Haddon Collection, courtesy MAA, Cambridge.

Collection at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge (**Fig. 7c**, for details of latter see Guha 2004: 16). Both confirmed to what Edwards has described for the latter, namely that ‘the coherence and equivalence of the photographs was created through copying, printing and mounting them identically. ... The standardized surfaces of the photographs and the unifying tonal range of the black and white glossy silver prints [engendered] uniformity, comparability– a mechanically controlled rather than mediated inscription... [that reinforced] the taxonomic readings of the images, creating a cohesive object rather than a series of images with their own semiotic energies.’ (Edwards 2002: 72).

Yet, despite attempts at regulating ‘the semantic traffic in photographs’ (Sekula 1986: 55) through acts of archiving, the two archives also expose the futility of imposing original meanings on photographs. The slippage between the image and its referent contributes to the layers of meaning a photograph may accrue through its circulation and archiving—meanings that are ascribed during its different situations of viewing, and established within different moments of its social biography.

The consumption of the photographs taken during projects of archaeological excavations and conservation, as tourist brochures, postage stamps and souvenirs (Figs. 8a–c), resonate upon photographs as social actors, in that they construct and influence discursive fields in ways which would not have been possible had they not existed. In this respect, samples from the Thomas Whiffen Collection (at MAA) provides a lucid example of the ways in which we use ‘identical’ images, i.e. those that share a ‘parent’ in the negative, for securing profoundly different narratives (Figs. 9a–c).

Whiffen photographed the ‘cannibal tribes’ of *The North West Amazons*, in 1908–09, within the perimeters of the Peruvian Amazonian Company, a European company notorious for its treatment of the labourers who worked within its rubber estates. However, he systematically erased the



Figs. 8: a) Postcard of the Kailash Temple, Ellora, produced by the Archaeological Department, Hyderabad State, ca. 1930s, courtesy MAA.



Fig. 8: b) Set of four postage stamps issued by INTACH (The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage), ca. 2000s.



Fig. 8: c) Photograph of the Taj Mahal (Agra) as fridge magnet, 2010.

context of this encounter through his photography. For example, by inserting the head image of the ‘chief’s son with a feathered head dress’ within his drawing of a dancing Muenane group (Whiffen 1915: plate XIII), he masked the European setting (Fig. 9a) in which he had taken the photograph of this boy (i.e. Fig. 9b). The identity of the young boy is ambiguous within the negative where we see him holding a dog, which contradicts Whiffen’s contentions that the indigenous people did not domesticate dogs. Neither the boy’s parentage, namely, a chief’s son, nor his tribal affiliations, whether a Boro, can be affirmed with certainty through Whiffen’s vague references of him in his publication (ibid: 76). Yet, the published image, glass plate negative and lantern-slide (fig. 9c) affix the boy’s ‘traditional’ status, and alert us of one of the most common and effective ways in which photographic truths are elicited for establishing eyewitness accounts.

Whiffen’s photography not only alerts us of our expectations from photographs, it also informs us of the importance of photographs as objects. For photographs often defy meanings despite our consistent efforts at fixing their iconographic identities, and the above shows that deliber-



Fig. 9: a) Positive image of glass negative with paper frame for highlighting the boy's head, Thomas Whiffen, Northwest South America, ca. 1908-'09, Courtesy MAA.



Fig. 9: c) Lantern slide, LS.26731.WHI



Fig. 9: b) The negative sans frame, *ibid*, N.26839.WHI

ations on the status of vision as a sensory perception does not present sufficient challenges for situating the role of vision and the visual within archaeological practices. It is only by accepting the centrality of vision within archaeology's evidentiary domain, can we question the stability of the object of our enquiries. Photographs and photographic archives lend us the heuristic means to do so.

Conclusion

From the early twentieth-century, photographs with no dark room manipulation beyond that which was needed to achieve a tonally balanced print were produced mainly to express the truth-value of direct field observations. Such photographs inform of scientific excavations that crosscut geographical and chronological differences, and bespoke of realist records of the field. Yet, eyewitness accounts of archaeological evidence has often entailed observations through analogical prisms, and photography's seminal contribution to archaeology can, perhaps, be best perceived as enabling the analogical nature of archaeological enquiry. In this respect, although photographs typifying Indian village scenes, and occupations of *jatis*, which were in wide circulation from the 1870s, were not published within the early specialist literature on archaeology, notions of unchanging cultural traditions, which such photographs were used for conveying, created truths about India's civilisational history. The following dictate of two, rather well known, archaeologists of South Asia, Raymond Allchin and Bridget Allchin, shows just how facile it is to impress upon the truths of civilisational

heritage through ethno-archaeological analogies that are substantiated by photographing the modern world. In their *Origins of a Civilization*, a book widely used for undergraduate teaching, the authors had declared that:

'If one needs further confirmation of the profound and lasting character of the Indus civilisation, and of its being the antecedent of the later civilisation which sprang up during the Iron Age and early Historic Period, one cannot do better than to visit the modern towns and villages of Sindh and the Punjab. Standing on the top of the high mound at Sehwan, on a winter's dawn, looking through the smoky haze that hangs over the town, it is not difficult to envisage the centuries slipping back some four and a half millennia and to picture this as a Harappan rather than twentieth-century town' (1997: 204–5).

The Allchins appended the above text with a photograph of a view of the modern town of Sehwan, which they took during their fieldwork of the area during the 1950s–'70s (ibid: plate 63). The photograph was meant to transmit the reality of their evocation, and its publication demonstrates the extent to which archaeology relies upon photography for creating the force of analogy as logic. Juxtapositions of disparate time frames through uses of photography satiates the ethno-archaeological method, and has often aided in exhibiting archaeological realities about a non-material, ideational *ethos*, namely, India's unique civilisational heritage. Photographs of reenactments showing possible uses of historical terrains by their past inhabitants has facilitated many compromised histories of a supposedly tactile, and materially recoverable entity, which in reality is continuously created because of changing historical circumstances. Engaging with the history of photography for exploring constructs of archaeological knowledge, therefore, occasions us to take stock of our historicizing processes.

The photographic documentation projects of Indian architectural and historical landscapes that were begun sporadically by the amateur and commercial photographers from the 1850s were motivated through an impetus akin to that which had governed the eighteenth-century paintings of India by Europeans. The aims of documentations were the same; namely to produce a lasting iconographic rendition of a land being newly seen. Yet, photography's parentage within the western viewing traditions also finds a strong echo within the histories of Indian (or South Asian) archaeology that have been written from the nineteenth century to date. Following Cunningham's dictates that 'the study of antiquities received its first impulse from Sir William Jones, who in 1784 founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal' (1871: v), the origins of antiquarian scholarship within the Indian sub-continent has been routinely tracked thereafter through the early European views of the region's past. This historical lineage for archaeology's nascence promotes the understanding that intellectual engagements with antiquities emanated within the modern region of South Asia as a distinctive 'western cognitive entity' (to quote Guha-Thakurta 2004: 3). Thus, all new histories of Indian archaeology (e.g. Chakrabarti 1988, Singh 2004, Lahiri 2006, Ray

2008) sustain a historiography that endorses the notion that the natives of Hindustan were beholden to the British for acquiring proper tools for undertaking historical investigations. Conceptual contradictions are inevitably bred when primary elements of a much-maligned historiography are simply accommodated as raw data. And considering that the modern histories of Indian archaeology claim to castigate the colonial historiography, their blatant emulation of the latter can only be summarised as being profoundly ironic.

In a world where archaeological knowledge is being increasingly showcased for establishing the historicity of unique cultural identities as national heritage, gleaning the ways in which archaeological practices create palpable truths and material presence of a non-present past through photography, to my mind, is perhaps the most important reason for exploring archaeology's histories. The experiential metaphor, which has been drawn by Bohrer for discerning photography's relationship with archaeology, may indeed allow us to see the nuances within the history of this relationship. However, we need clear and focused analyses of what the semantic grounds of this relationship may be, which Bohrer wishes us to explore, for gauging the implications of photographs and photography on the constitution, transformations and uses of archaeological evidence.

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