

Upinder Singh, *The Discovery of Ancient India: Early Archaeologists and the Beginnings of Archaeology*. Delhi: Permanent Black (2004). xix + 381 pp., 27 illustrations.

The purpose of this book is to enhance our understanding of archaeology in India by looking at published and archival sources gathered by archaeologists in the 19th Century. Singh does this by looking at the careers of significant individuals, looking at the debates that arose between these various men, and showing the impact of these debates on the 19th Century treatment of Indian archaeological sites. The main (and undisputedly the most important) archaeologist that she writes about is Alexander Cunningham, the founder of the Archaeological Survey of India. She then considers the careers of his protégées (J.D.M. Beglar, A.C.L. Carlleyle, James Fergusson, James Burgess and Henry H. Cole junior) and the careers of Indian historians and archaeologists (Ram Raz, Rajendralala Mitra, P.C. Mukharji and Bhagawanlal Indraji). The places discussed in the book are mainly early Buddhist sites such as Bodhgaya, Sanchi, Bharhut and Amaravati, but a lot of general discussion is also given over to the broader survey work conducted by the ASI.

By focusing on the careers of the key individuals involved with the ASI in the 19th Century, and looking at the opinions and decisions these individuals imposed on each other and on specific monuments, Singh has written a solid piece of research. She begins by emphasizing that indigenous understandings of ancient Indian history indisputably existed before the Colonial period. The Colonial ‘discovery’ of Ancient India discussed in this book relates to the introduction of a Western framework towards the understanding of ancient Indian history, the focus here being the role of the relatively new discipline of archaeology in this discovery.

By recounting the careers of individuals, and looking at how their attitudes effected the way particular archaeological sites were treated, Singh addresses some broader debates about the nature of 19th Century archaeology in India. For example, she looks at the ASI’s deliberation over whether to focus on field studies or on architectural description, as epitomised by James Burgess’ opinions. Another debate she addresses is the changing role of conservation during the 19th Century, particularly the controversy over whether it was best to remove sculptures to museums or conserve them in-situ. A third debate she addresses is the role of Indian scholars in this colonial venture. In spite of being interlopers in a white man’s project, a handful of talented Indians contributed to the ASI’s 19th Century work. The impact of the Ilbert Bill on this contribution is also discussed.

The first two chapters look at Colonial investigations of India’s past prior to the establishment of the ASI. Chapter One, *From Antiquarianism to Archaeology*, looks at the military surveyors, antiquarian scholars and East India Company adventurers who first explored and gathered information for Western consumption in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries. The forays of men such as Colin Mackenzie, James Prinsep and James Lewis (a.k.a. Charles Masson) gave rise to the early antiquarian documentation of India’s historical sites and monuments. Singh absents from these discussions the artists who toured India to gather and market topographical views to a European audience, such as William Hodges and Thomas and William Daniell. The second chapter describes the early career of Alexander Cunningham, beginning with his arrival in Calcutta in 1833, and going up to the 1850s, immediately before the

foundation of the first Archaeological Survey. Cunningham's early career is significant, as it formed a conduit between the antiquarian investigations of the early 19th Century and the adoption of archaeology as a discipline in the latter part of the same century. In 1861 he became the first archaeological surveyor to the Government of India. Cunningham's career prior to this appointment foreshadows many of the attitudes he held as archaeological surveyor. From these attitudes, the various debates that characterised archaeological investigations in India unfolded.

The third and fourth chapters look at the history of the ASI under Cunningham. Chapter Three looks at the first ASI, which lived briefly between 1861 and 1865. It was a small one man show, headed by Cunningham, which was concerned with surveying monuments, and not with their conservation. The fourth chapter looks at the second ASI, founded once again by Cunningham, in 1871. He was the Director General of this more substantial ASI until 1886. In these two chapters Singh documents the many surveys that Cunningham implemented. She provides a comprehensive, chronologically organised list of these surveys of the Punjab, Rajputana, Malwa, Budelkhand, Bihar, Bengal, Central Provinces the Gangetic Provinces and other sites, providing a valuable reference tool. Most significantly however, Singh looks at Cunningham's fascination with early Chinese accounts of Buddhist pilgrimage sites. Cunningham's interest in identifying these sites was perhaps his most interesting research obsession.

The importance of Cunningham's ASI work is Herculean, and whilst at times the operation of the ASI was addled with disputes, Singh shows how Cunningham's work was a vast improvement on how archaeological investigations were previously conducted. Before the ASI's establishment, local governments initiated archaeological investigations, so it was inevitable that disparate approaches to the documentation and care of monuments existed all over the subcontinent. With the 1871 establishment of the ASI, a more systematic approach to survey work could be implemented. The government of India assigned three tasks to Cunningham. First, he had to compile a summary of previous archaeological enquiries, which he did promptly. Second, he had to prepare a strategy for his staff to follow when investigating sites. This, understandably, was a difficult task to achieve. Third, he had to prepare annual reports documenting the ASI's investigations. Cunningham also incorporated other modes of investigation into India's archaeology, such as the employment of epigraphists like J.F. Fleet and photographers such as W.G. Murray.

The next two chapters look at the careers of Cunningham's two protégées, J.D.M. Beglar and A.C.L. Carlleyle. In 1871 Cunningham had to appoint staff to help run the ASI. Because there were no trained archaeologists in India who he could appoint, he selected two men from quite different yet potentially relevant backgrounds. The first, J.D.M. Beglar, was from a Calcutta based Armenian family, and was previously employed as an assistant engineer in the Bengal Public Works Department. The second, A.C.L. Carlleyle, was the curator of the Riddell Museum at Agra, and before then, had worked in the Indian Museum, Calcutta. Beglar conducted numerous ASI surveys between 1871 and 1876, but particularly made a (bad) name for himself as the person responsible for the disastrous resoration of the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodhgaya between 1880 and 1884. Beglar arranged for the Bengal Public Works Department to perform the repairs, causing howls of outrage from James Burgess. By contrast, Carlleyle showed little enthusiasm for working with architectural

monuments. Instead, his career was characterised by an overarching fascination with dirt archaeology. He investigated cairns and burial mounds, sculptural fragments and ancient coins, ruined stupas and pottery shards. All this was tempered with an interest in geology. He distinguished himself as the first member of the ASI to document India's prehistoric heritage, but unfortunately for Carlleyle, there was little interest in his style of investigations at that point in time. Only recently, though the work of Dilip K. Chakrabarti, has the value of Carlleyle's work, which was so flagrantly uncharacteristic for the 1870s and early 1880s, been recognised.

The description and care of monuments, particularly the attitudes held by Cunningham, Burgess and Cole, is the topic of the next chapter. Focusing on their critiques of work done at Bodhgaya, Sanchi and Bharhut, Singh elucidates the way these three men postured themselves. Before the ASI's creation, Cunningham had a history of dubious excavation tactics from his research in the 1850s at Sanchi and its neighbouring stupa sites. Along with F.C. Maisey, he had dug shafts into these stupas to remove relic caskets, and left the mutilated areas exposed to the elements. Throughout his career, Cunningham had put forward other equally dubious proposals, such as one to peel the Ajanta frescoes away from the cave walls they were affixed to. (Fortunately, this was never attempted.) Burgess and Cole had more careful views on the conservation of monuments, but their opinions moved in opposite directions on one particular issue. Cole advocated the in-situ conservation of all monuments, while Burgess' opinions on in-situ conservation varied from site to site. In particular, Burgess and Cole were in conflict over the treatment of the carved stones at Amaravati. Burgess wanted to remove these sculpted pieces to museums, but was stopped by Cole, who advocated their placement in-situ, in spite of the almost total destruction of the site. Cole's interference with Burgess' plans was a huge source of contention between the two men.

The history of the stupa site at Amaravati, and the battle between Cole and Burgess over the treatment of its sculpted stones, is the topic of Chapter Eight. The previous chapters of the book provide a perfect backdrop to the analysis of Amaravati's archaeological history, as it begins with Mackenzie's work, and moves forward into the present day. This chapter is based on an article published by Singh in 2001. With its additions, and its positioning within the wider scope of this book, this chapter is definitely the admirable crescendo of Singh's research. The next chapter, titled *The 'Ignorant Natives' and Archaeological Research*, gives an apt analysis of Indian scholars who were connected with the ASI. These scholars came up against a multitude of prejudices, such as a lack of faith in the abilities of Indians, and the ASI's reluctance to pay Indian staff high salaries. In spite of this, a handful of men, such as P.C. Mukharji and Rajendralala Mitra, distinguished themselves within certain ASI debates. In Mukharji's case, he played a role in exposing one of the most infamous frauds ever committed by an archaeologist in South Asia. In Mitra's case, he wrote extensively on Indian monuments, and drew attention to issues surrounding their preservation. In reaction to his outspokenness, James Fergusson wrote an attack on Mitra in his book, *Archaeology in India with Especial Reference to the Works of Babu Rajendralala Mitra*. The mere existence of Fergusson's book speaks volumes about the strained relationship between Indian and European scholars in India during that period.

I caught a couple of incorrect references to London based material in this book. In particular, Robert Gill's remaining drawings of Ajanta frescoes are not held in the India Office Collections of the British Library (p.56, note 2) and the Mackenzie Amaravati Album was digitised by the British Library, not the British Museum (p.288, note 9). Another minor error is Singh's mention of Edward Fell's account of Sanchi. She says his account was gathered in 1834 (p.231), but in fact it was gathered much earlier, in the winter of 1819-20, at the prompting of Colin Mackenzie! Fortunately, to make up for these errors Singh clarifies a handful of mistaken references given by her predecessors. In particular, she clearly points out that Henry Cole of the South Kensington Museum was not the same person as Henry Cole, the ASI's Curator of Ancient Monuments. They were actually father and son.

This book is an immensely valuable contribution to the study of Indian archaeology, particularly its historiography, which will benefit researchers and students alike. It is a carefully indexed, comprehensive study of the key players in the formation of the ASI, and it provides valuable analysis to the history of some of India's most famous and most frequently studied monuments. Singh also points out the main issues of debate that the early ASI instigated. Its strength lies in Singh's reliance on primary sources, in particular those held in Delhi's National Archives. Her work will give future researchers an idea of the rich holdings in the National Archives of India that are awaiting investigation, and will help disseminate important information that has been published in this book for the first time. Singh lets her sources tell the story about the meanings and motivations behind India's 19th Century archaeologists.