CHAPTER II: COLONIAL ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE MUSEUM

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the transition of sculptural artefacts from their secondary position within the antiquities frame (which privileged literary antiquities) to their quasi-autonomous status as ‘documents of history’ within the frame of colonial archaeology. The analysis theorizes the reifying gaze of the colonial archaeologist, which reduces and fragments artefacts and their contexts into manageable scientific ‘specimens’ for the colonial archive. Towards the last quarter of the 19th century, these artefacts undergo yet another transition within the colonialist museum frame – museumized and monumentalized, a selection of these artefacts become singularized (even aestheticized) within the Imperial museums and in situ monument sites, in keeping with the new rhetoric of display championed by the British Raj. Colonialist art history, which is responsible for recontextualizing these objects within an official version of history, provides the script for this Imperial ‘performance’. I unearth the ideological underpinnings of the renewed visuality and materiality of the artefact within this context.

Background

By the 1820’s, the scholarly Orientalism pioneered by Jones and his Asiatic Society contemporaries was losing its authority as the official vehicle of knowledge about India. Replacing it was a new kind of knowledge-production, backed by ‘field’ observations of trained functionaries and professionals who were trained to observe, measure, enumerate and record rather than to speculate or theorize. With the consolidation of colonial territories across the subcontinent, an era of systematic surveys was initiated, mapping the country in terms of longitude and latitude, recording its topographical features, surveying land use, listing its resources and classifying its peoples. The consolidation of empirical protocols, intended to generate “hard” objective data about India, had the additional advantage of rendering colonial knowledge production self-sufficient, giving its researchers relative autonomy from ‘native’ intermediaries. “Surveyors took great pains
to distinguish data *gleaned* from the accounts of natives from data *produced* by direct observation...”

There was a growing confidence in the effectiveness of colonial historical scholarship—evident from the incremental expansion of historical knowledge by the first half of the 19th century. India’s past was no longer an undifferentiated, mysterious matrix that it used to be when Jones began his researches. A framework of chronological certainties, alongside a palatably ‘European’ picture of dynasties, successions, wars and conquests across regions in the subcontinent was beginning to emerge.

The first half of the 19th century witnessed an exponential rise in colonialist scholarship in historical research. Several new societies were set up along the lines of the Asiatic Society of Bengal both in India and in Britain; prominent among them were the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland headquartered at London, and the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, at the Presidency capital. The London Society was set up in 1823 by H.T.Colebrooke on his return to England. It was “instituted for the investigations of the sciences and arts of Asia, with the hope of facilitating ameliorations there and of advancing knowledge and improving the arts at home” and the scope of its researches was to cover “both ancient and modern times, and include history, civil polity, institutions, manners, customs, languages, literature and science”.2 The Bombay Literary Society, which was transformed into the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society in 1841, was dedicated to the extension of knowledge “on subjects of Oriental subjects, more particularly connected with the Antiquities, Philology, Geography and History of Western India.”

This period was also the most productive in terms of the number of landmark archaeological discoveries made. Surveyor Colin Mackenzie stumbled upon Amaravati in 1797, documented it in 1816 and throughout the 1830’s and 40’s, the site and its portable artefacts were the source of much debate and

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3 *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (The Society., 1844), i.
concern for its colonial caretakers. In 1819, officers of the British army discovered the Ajanta caves and in 1830, James Alexander described the site in the detail in the second issue of the Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society. Architectural and sculptural remains from the Gandhara region, brought to the notice of British scholars in the early 1830’s, inspired a revival of interest in the history of Indian antiquities. Between 1835 and 1842, James Fergusson toured the subcontinent documenting architectural remains and classifying them. Epigraphy, a respectable and rigorous science by the 1830’s, underwent a revolution with James Prinsep’s deciphering of Asokan Brahmi and Kharoshti.

In his History of Indian Archaeology, Dilip Chakrabarti summarizes the developments during this period, remarking that “from about 1830 onwards the number of specifically archaeological writings was on the increase.”

The lines of archaeological enquiry between 1830 and 1861 were basically in the following directions: the opening of “topes” or Buddhist stupas in the northwest and the consequent increase in interest in the antiquities of the region, principally Indo-Greek coins and sculpture; a gradual increase in the number of notices of ancient sites throughout the country; occasional excavations in north India; a significant amount of “barrow-hunting” in the south; and finally, a greater realization of the need for a systematic survey.

By the mid-19th century, the map of India was flagged with a significant number of pre-modern antiquities and archaeological sites. Portable fragments were shifted to museums in Calcutta and London and documentation was similarly centralized. Bit by bit, a comprehensive archive of Indian antiquities was being constructed, the next step on the road to ‘induction’ as anticipated by Jones and his contemporaries. Reports, analyses

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6 Ibid., 258.
and monographs about individual sites, architectural edifices and sculptural fragments proliferate in the journals and transactions of orientalist and literary societies both in India and in London. By the late 1850’s, the artefactual archive, along with the incipient discipline of archaeology that generated it, had become so vast and specialized that it outgrew its earlier position as a sub-discourse of civil history. The need was felt for a new kind of institutional support system to bind these new units of knowledge into an autonomous scientific discourse, a need that was filled by the establishment of the Archaeological Survey of India.

The Revolt of 1857 exposed the precariousness of the British position in India, damaging the heady optimism and reformist zeal that characterized colonial administration in the previous decades.\(^8\) Ironically, the decades following the Revolt were a fertile period for the consolidation and systematization of archaeological data and research, the institutionalization of colonial archaeology and the subsequent establishment of the first public Museum in India. In 1862, an Archaeological Department, headed by General Alexander Cunningham was instituted to survey and document the monuments and antiquities of Northern India. In 1870, the issue of centralization was pursued and the Archaeological Survey of India was established. Cunningham took over as its first Director General in 1871. In 1874, regional surveys for Bombay and Madras presidencies followed. Between 1889 and 1902, the ASI was dissolved, fragmented, retrenched and finally resurrected by the then Viceroy, Lord Curzon.\(^9\) The objectives and methods of the institution were systematized during this troubled formative period. Archaeological exploration, documentation and conservation of ancient monuments and sculpture were the focus areas, with support from the fields of epigraphy and numismatics. Photography and casting were introduced to extend traditional documentation methods. Archaeological excavation techniques and stratigraphy were progressively refined.

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The decades following the Revolt witnessed the setting up of the first imperial public museum in India – the Indian Museum in Calcutta. Though the Asiatic Society museum had functioned as an important storehouse for amateur collecting of geological and natural history specimens, ethnographic objects, art manufactures and some portable antiquarian remains from its inception in 1814, it was accessible only to a small group of members and their associates. Similar museums were set up in the other presidency capitals in the 1850’s. In 1866, the museum in Calcutta was delinked from the Asiatic Society and thrown open to the public.\textsuperscript{10} By the 1880’s it had a full-fledged archaeological gallery, with sculptures from Bharhut and the Gandhara region occupying pride of place.\textsuperscript{11}

The issue of preservation and conservation \textit{in situ} of antiquarian remains was addressed seriously between the 1870’s and 1880’s. The archaeological surveys conducted in the presidencies provided the foundation for this imperial enterprise. In 1873, an official order charged local governments with the preservation of monuments under their jurisdiction. Between 1881 and 1884, H. H. Cole was appointed Curator of Ancient Monuments, (a post independent of the ASI) and charged with the duty of classifying ancient monuments across the country and aiding local governments in the task of conservation. The Indian Treasure Trove Act of 1878 empowered the Imperial government and its regional representatives to acquire all objects of archaeological interest found across the subcontinent; these were to be evaluated according to very clearly defined criteria mentioned in the Act itself. This was followed, during the period of Lord Curzon, by the establishment of site museums across the country.

The first colonial art histories, which tried to recast some antiquarian remains within the ‘art’ frame (with many reservations and provisos), served to (con)-textualize the museumization and monumentalization of artefacts in an academic sphere. James Fergusson’s encyclopedic \textit{History of Indian and Eastern Architecture}, first published in 1876, derived its theoretical formulations from Victorian theories of biological evolution and race and from


\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., 73.
trends in stylistic analysis and connoisseurship that marked European art history during this period, in equal measure. Fergusson’s work was paradigmatic; it was quoted, imitated and modified repeatedly into the first decades of the twentieth century and continues, in my opinion, to influence surveys of pre-modern Indian art to this day.12

A parallel development, significant from the point of view of Indian art history today, was the apotheosis of Indian ‘art manufactures’ and ‘industrial arts’ in a series of international exhibitions beginning with the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition in London. Catalogues like G.C.M. Birdwood’s *The Industrial Arts of India* (pub 1880) and journals like *The Journal of Indian Art and Industry* provided textual support for this enterprise. The traditional ‘Indian craftsman’, skillfully and unquestioningly producing sumptuous and refined commodities with a hereditary instinct for good design became a trope for another important mid 19th century colonial construction – the enduring, unchanging, passive, self-sufficient and orthodox ‘village India’.

It was with a view to ‘improving design and taste’ among native craft communities and readying a cadre of technically proficient draughtsmen and artisans that the first government art schools were set up in the presidency capitals and in Lahore between the 1850’s and 1870’s. Museums displaying a selected array of Indian art manufactures and of Western ‘fine art’, mostly in reproduction, were added as pedagogical resources to these schools.

**SECTION I: THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL FRAME**

Consider the nuances that differentiate H. T. Colebrooke’s characterization of the importance of inscriptive evidence within the antiquities frame (1813) and James Fergusson’s dismissal (1866) of ‘written annals’ of Indian history as untrustworthy in the reconstruction of the history of India.

Colebrooke writes:

> In the scarcity of authentic materials for the ancient and even for the modern, history of the Hindu race, importance is justly attached

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12James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture,* (J. Murray, 1876).
to all genuine monuments, and especially inscriptions on stone and metal, which are occasionally discovered through various accidents. If these be carefully preserved and diligently examined; and the facts, ascertained from them, be judiciously employed towards elucidating scattered information, which can be yet collected from the remains of Indian literature, a satisfactory progress may be finally made in investigating the history of the Hindus.\textsuperscript{13}

Twenty years later, James Prinsep makes a statement that appears remarkably similar in form and content:

Aware indeed that the only accurate data we possessed for adjusting the chronology of Indian princes were those derived from ancient monuments of stone; inscriptions on rocks and caves...discovered accidentally in various parts of the country; -- I could not see the highly curious column at Allahabad, falling to rapid decay, without wishing to preserve a complete copy of its several inscriptions....It is greatly to be regretted that the task was not accomplished twenty or thirty years ago....\textsuperscript{14}

In 1848, Alexander Cunningham, Prinsep’s protégé, dismisses the value of ‘Hindu’ literary sources for historical reconstruction, claiming that “the discovery and publication of all the existing remains of architecture and sculpture, with coins and inscriptions, would throw more light on the ancient history of India...than the printing of all the rubbish contained in the 18 Puranas.”\textsuperscript{15} Two decades later, James Fergusson, in a lecture to the Society of Arts in London, underlines the value of lithic architecture, along with inscriptions and coins, in the reconstruction of Indian history:

It seems almost impossible to overestimate the value of these stone landmarks in a country where so few books exist, and so little history, and where what does exist is so very untrustworthy....in India there are no written annals that can be trusted. It is only when it [history] can be authenticated by inscriptions and coins that

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\textsuperscript{14} James Prinsep quoted in O. P. Kejariwal, \textit{The Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Discovery of India’s Past, 1784-1838} (Oxford University Press, 1999), 169.  
\textsuperscript{15}Alexander Cunningham quoted in Chakrabarti, \textit{A History of Indian Archaeology}, 52.
\end{flushright}
we feel sure of the existence of any King, and it is only when we can find his buildings that we can measure his greatness or ascertain what his tendencies were, or what the degree of civilization to which either he or his people attained.”

Between Colebrooke’s statement and Prinsep’s a decade later, it is possible to discern a subtle shift in the aims, priorities and methodology of research into Indian Antiquities. Colebrooke is arguably the last important representative of the Jones generation, which views textual sources as primary documents for the reconstruction of Indian history. Within the antiquities frame, inscriptions and coins along with non-literary artefacts are secondary documents, providing supporting, supplementary evidence. Inscriptions ‘elucidate’ information from literature; literature, however scarce and inauthentic, is still viewed as the principal source of history. Colebrooke’s argument continues along these lines: given the state of knowledge during his time, inscriptions might be of limited use for a reconstruction of political history and chronology. However, they offer invaluable insights into ‘customs’ and ‘manners’, ideas and beliefs of peoples past and this is their primary significance. Colebrooke’s philological and antiquarian commitments are in keeping with the more anthropological orientation of Enlightenment philosophical history.

Prinsep’s preoccupation with inscriptions and coins are less antiquarian than historical; his primary interest is political history whose foundation is a sound chronology and this in turn depends on the accuracy of data. In another context, Prinsep remarks: “What the learned world demands 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.” Prinsep statement is an affirmation of ‘monuments’ as the only source of accurate data for a chronology of ‘Indian princes’.

By the second half of the 19th century, the denigration of ‘inauthentic’ literary sources and a parallel valourization of ‘authentic’ remains of architecture and

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17Prinsep, “On the Edicts of Piyadasi, or Asoke, the Buddhist Monarch of India, preserved on the Girnar rock in the Gujerat peninsula, and on the Dhauli rock in Cuttack; with the discovery of Ptolemy’s name therein,” in Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (Bishop’s College Press, 1838), 227.
sculpture, along with coins and inscriptions, become entrenched within colonialist discourses as a justification, even, for the importance of archaeological investigations. The dismantling of the broadly humanist antiquities frame, with its heavy reliance on native intermediaries and literary sources and the simultaneous spurt in status for the material artefact within the new ‘archaeological frame’ is a curious phenomenon, which I will term the ‘archaeological turn’.

The 1830’s marked the end of the era of expansive ‘liberal’ enquiries envisaged by the Orientalists of the Jones generation, an encyclopedic survey of ‘all that was produced by nature and all that was performed by man. Replacing it was a more instrumental approach to India as a tabula rasa for political, administrative and socio-cultural reform. The reconstruction of Indian history was still considered vital to this project. In his enormously influential History of British India (pub. 1819), James Mill dismissed the scholarly Orientalist enterprise in India, with its overvaluing of India’s past, its dependence on textual sources and on maulvis and pandits, as a product of ‘susceptible imagination.’ For Mill, Indian culture exhibited immaturity and stagnation, there was no high civilization in the past, no subsequent decline.

The attitudes of liberals like Mill and Thomas Babington Macaulay had lasting consequences for the study of Indian culture and history. Debates about the validity of Oriental learning and its utility for the perpetuation of colonial rule surfaced during the second decade of the 19th century. The Orientalist camp, lead by scholars like H.H. Wilson, argued for government patronage of Oriental knowledge whereas the Anglicist position recommended the withdrawal of state support to institutions promoting the study and dissemination of ‘Hindu or Mahomedan learning’. Prinsep himself vehemently opposed the Anglican-Utilitarian position on Oriental studies and likened the withdrawal of state support to the publication of oriental works to the destruction of the Alexandrine library.

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18 Javed Majeed, Ungoverned Imaginings: James Mill’s The History of British India and Orientalism (Clarendon Press, 1992), 163.
19 Ibid., 144–145.
20 Charles Allen, Buddha & the Sahibs (Hodder Pb, 2003), 165–166.
It is reasonable to expect that the Anglicist-Utilitarian denigration of ‘traditional’ knowledge, accompanied by withdrawal of state support for institutions and publications that propagated oriental learning in 1835 would have signalled the end of the Orientalist project in India. Antiquities research, like research into all matters cultural and not strictly instrumental, ought to have perished alongside ambitious literary ventures like the Asiatic Society’s *Bibliotheca Asiatica* translation project. However, the crackdown seems to have had the opposite effect on the study of antiquities; by any standard, the period between 1830 and 1860 was something of a golden age for artefact documentation, classification and historical research in general. This anomaly can be accounted for by the re-articulation of ‘antiquities’ (the term antiquities is still in use throughout this period) within the new colonial discourse of archaeology. In the section that follows, I posit the emergence of a new object, the archaeological specimen, as a unit of analysis within the archaeological frame.

**The Artefact as Scientific Fact**

In the Jones generation, the empirical study of material artefacts suffered a double disadvantage. The first was one status: in the context of a philology-driven historiography, the study of material remains was secondary to the study of literary sources. The second was the larger epistemological frame; the study of antiquities was always subordinate to larger ‘Universal history’ concerns of Enlightenment humanism. If ‘philology’ established the paradigm for 18th century researches into Indian history, the 19th century colonial approach can be justifiably described as ‘archaeological’. The Jones-Colebrooke-Prinsep transition was definitely a shift in paradigm. It was marked by the erosion of the totalising conception of History, of ‘all that is performed by Man’, with its speculative-philosophical underpinnings in Enlightenment humanism. Replacing it was a new and radically ‘scientific’ approach to history; history as an accumulation of empirically ascertainable facts – principally, chronology and political history.

As an area that dealt exclusively with ‘material evidence’ from the past, the new discourse of colonial archaeology (as the study of antiquities minus literary sources) experienced a sudden spurt in stature. Between 1830 and 1850, it cast off its poor relative status *vis a vis* history, evolved an
autonomous sphere of operation and reformed itself along scientific lines. In this first phase, we see a proliferation of field reports in journals, acquiring critical mass, gaining in rigour, establishing methodological protocols through an accumulation of precedents. The second phase, between the 1860’s and 1880’s, marks the consolidation and systematization of the new discourse into a full-fledged discipline, with the establishment of the ASI, the professionalization of archaeology and the differentiation of supporting specializations – epigraphy and numismatics.

The field report was the primary methodological unit of archaeological investigations in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. Unlike their 18\textsuperscript{th} century counterparts, 19\textsuperscript{th} century field reports of archaeological sites avoid speculation and hypothesis, giving primacy to observation and measurements. The typical field report incorporates all or most of these elements 1) Geographical location of the site (lat-long), its geology, aspect 2) The name of the site and its variants, sometimes incorporating local knowledge 3) Morphological description of prominent edifices, remains along with measurements 3) Architectural plans, elevations and other illustrations 5) Morphological description of sculpture, fragments, sometimes accompanied by illustrations 6) Copies/estampages of inscriptions 7) A record of coins, if found 8) Local accounts of the site, its origins and significance.\textsuperscript{21}

The 19\textsuperscript{th} century field report balances a crudely formalist ‘documentation’ of visual antiquities with an hierarchical ordering of information which cuts out large chunks of content and context as if they were so much ‘noise’ in the field of pure empirical signals. Descriptive documentation is a verbal paraphrase of the archaeological site. Photographic documentation is the visual counterpart of description. Plans and measurements serve to clarify and ‘ground’ descriptions and photographs in terms of geometry and arithmetic. A complex artefact is ‘comprehended’ in its documentation.

Thus identified, characterized and comprehended, the individual artefact is ready to become the basic unit of archaeological analysis, rather like a natural history specimen captured and suspended in a jar of formalin. A problem with this ideal scenario is that artefacts rarely occur as ‘pure’

\textsuperscript{21}See, for example, Cunningham’s short description of his method in his Memorandum, Archaeological Survey of India, Report (Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1871), viii.
individual entities. What defines a unit in archaeological terms? A monument site? A sculptural fragment? Colonial archaeologists encountered a bewildering array of remains, architectural features, narrative reliefs, icons, decorative panels, fragments, reliquaries, inscriptions, coins, and most troublingly, lacunae – missing elements. In order to bring some order into this chaos, they started off with two (pre-chronological) classifications for the more complex manifestations: 1) Communal categories ‘Buddhist, Hindu, Jain, ‘Mahomedan’ [sic] which corresponded with the official colonial ‘map’ of religions in India. 2) A heterogenous, conventional taxonomy of types (cave-temples, monoliths, ‘topes’ [stupas], temples, mosques, etc)

Partially contained within a manageable nomenclature of overlapping types, all complex manifestations could be then be broken up into ‘constituent’ elements - architecture, sculpture, inscriptions, coins – clearly imported from a European definition of ‘antiquities’ but used within the archaeological frame as analytic categories. Architecture could be further divided into plan, elevation, façade, pillar orders; sculpture into figurative, ornamental and so on. The fragmentation of complex archaeological sites into these basic elements allowed for a comparison between say, pillar orders of one cave temple with pillar orders of another, to trace the development of pillars in cave temples.

Consider this excerpt, a list of ‘desiderata’ for further information on cave temples and monasteries, in survey of western Indian sites, published in the 1850 volume of Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society. It sums up the authorized ‘scientific’ approach to Indian antiquities during this period, with a noticeably hierarchized ordering of knowledge, beginning with the most empirical (and most reliable), moving through the less significant aspects of the monuments in question and ending with ‘native knowledge’ (the least reliable).

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1. The position, size and number [of cave temples and monasteries].
2. Their form, dimensions and religious character [i.e., Buddhist, Brahmanical or Jaina].
3. The peculiarities of their architecture as illustrative of their age, and the progress and history of art.
4. Their inscriptions, original and apocryphal, of which both copies and facsimilies are needed.
5. Their mythological figures in their forms and attitudes and their general mythological and moral import.
6. Their ornamental figures.
7. Their contiguity with other groups.
8. The light in which they are viewed by the natives, who inhabit the localities in which they are situated.

By substituting just ten keywords of this list, what we have is a questionnaire perfectly suitable for botanical or paleontological research. The analogy is not as fanciful as it appears. For Cunningham, archaeological research generates ‘fossil fragments of the great skeleton of lost Indian history’. To elaborate on the botanical analogy, we have here a taxonomic classification (religious character), morphology (size, form, dimensions), biogeography (position, contiguity with other groups), phylogeny (architectural peculiarities related to age), anatomy (inscriptions, figures) and ethnobotany (‘native’ information).

It is significant how this list requires that the contents of the architectural complexes studied be separated and laid out as if on a dissection tray (points 4, 5 and 6) - architecture, inscriptions, mythological figures, ornamental figures. One consequence of this infinitely ramifying fragmentation was that it becomes possible to juxtapose spatially and temporally discontinuous forms to derive a developmental sequence and thence a relative chronology.

Finally, a series of operations were designed to place the artefact on a temporal axis – to chronologize was after all the final destination of the archaeological frame. The clearest articulation of the methodology used for

dating and classifying architectural antiquities may be found in *Dravidian Architecture*, by French historian Gustave Jouveau-Dubreuil; he used this system to chronologize Dravidian monuments in the Chingleput, South and North Arcot districts of Tamilnadu.\textsuperscript{25}

1. The first operation is to survey and document a comprehensive list of monuments from a limited geographical region.

2. Then those monuments from this comprehensive group which can be dated accurately using ‘external’ aids like epigraphical and palaeographical evidence, are selected and arranged datewise on a chronological table.

3. The third step is a comparative exercise; the selected monuments of known periods are compared and contrasted with each other to isolate formal features that they have in common from those that are different. This comparison is made with the intention of arriving at generalizations about what architectural features, motifs and arrangements are shared by coeval monuments and in what ways these are modified, discarded or otherwise transformed in monuments of subsequent periods. These generalizations are in the form of specific, quantifiable units of knowledge which function like clinical tests for making a diagnosis and have to be systematically employed.

4. Finally, these generalizations are applied to other undated monuments in the group, which can be diagnosed as belonging to this or that period or as marking a transition between two documented styles.

The success of colonial archaeology in extracting chronological information from the most recalcitrant of objects appears, in retrospect, almost miraculous. The emphasis on system, the myopic focus on diagnostic form to the exclusion of all other criteria was, without doubt, a contributory factor. However, the deeply ideological underpinnings of the exercise cannot be left out of the account. Colonial archaeology’s reification of cultural productions from India’s past still has consequences for art history today.

**The Reifying Gaze of Colonial Archaeology**

Colonial archaeology identifies and abstracts its objects from their geographical/ environmental location, their social milieu, the local usages and traditions that surround and penetrate them. It subjects them to a forensic

\textsuperscript{25}G. Jouveau Dubreuil, *Dravidian Architecture* (Asian Educational Services, 1987).
regime of documenting and analytic procedures that ‘translates’ them into archive-friendly form – plans, elevations, measurements, descriptive documentation, photographic documentation of the whole and its parts. Rationalised and reduced to quantitative and empirical factors, these objects become knowable quantities, fixed permanently in a visual and textual record of the relation of their parts to each other and on an absolute scale of numerical values.

The ‘abstraction’ of the artefacts from their geographical and socio-cultural entanglements was a necessary preliminary towards aligning their physical attributes, visually and quantitatively perceived, with their ‘real’ significance for colonial epistemology (always associated with their historical moment of origin). Johannes Fabian makes a similar point about ‘ethnographic objects’ in the colonial context though in this case, the ‘life-world’ of the object often includes spheres of active production and consumption.

To have been ethnographically collected, that is, removed from its context of production and consumption, is of the essence of the ethnographic object. As a scientific object it has its function, not as a keepsake or souvenir, nor as a token of experience or memory, or as a curio arousing curiosity or causing amusement, but as an item to be placed in systems of classification and taxonomic description. Strictly speaking, the absence of context...is not a problem with ethnographic objects; it is, as it were, their condition of possibility. If the demands for context were met, things that figure as ethnographic objects would be "scientifically” useless.26

The documentation protocol of the archaeological project, which included measurement, delineation, photography, casting and description, each verifiable against the other, served to convert what was essentially a qualitative experience into a quantitative one. The experiential nature of the encounter was rationalized in ‘scientific terms’. The subjective, embodied response of the viewer was carefully filtered out by reducing the objects’ material and visual manifestations (I use the plural deliberately here because there are spatio-temporal and relational factors in the act of viewing) into ‘objective’ descriptive and quantitative terms. The perceiving subject was

posted strictly outside the field of vision. The colonial functionary/field archaeologist was positioned in this discourse as a disinterested and impartial observer, a disembodied ‘eye’, a replaceable component in the colonial machinery, working within the methodological parameters sanctioned by the colonial enterprise.

The subject position which corresponds to this kind of objectification is objectivism. W.J.T. Mitchell, in his book *What do Pictures Want?*, draws a pertinent distinction between objectivity, “the somewhat detached, skeptical attitude associated with scientific research” and objectivism, “the conviction that we do possess, or will in due course, an exhaustive, eternally comprehensive description of the ‘given’.”

Objectivity is an essential component of that open, curious, and unresolved frame of mind that makes the encounter with novel, alien realities possible and desirable....Objectivism is the ideological parody of objectivity, and tends towards self-assurance and certainty about the sovereign subject’s grip on the real –objectivism is the ideological fantasy of what Rousseau called the “sovereign subject,” a picture of the beholder as imperial, imperious consciousness, capable of surveying and ordering the entire object world.27

I want to suggest here that the difference between the ‘objectivity’ of empirical reports on antiquities in the Jones era and the ‘objectivism’ of mid-19th century archaeological researches signposts the transition from the antiquities frame to the archaeological frame. The objectivist stance of the archaeological frame, I believe, continues to have a major influence on the mainstream historiography of pre-modern Indian art even today.

Fergusson writes nostalgically of his delight “in visiting the various cities of Hindostan, so picturesque in their decay, or so beautiful in their modern garb....among the wildly picturesque scenery of Rajputana...over which the writings of [James] Tod have shed such a halo of romance.”28 But here the enchantment ends; for Fergusson, a man of action and science, the spell is

broken by the need to solve the more realistic ‘problem’ of chronology and stylistic variations of Indian architecture. Fergusson continues:

Nowhere are the styles of architecture so various as in India, and nowhere are the changes so rapid, or follow laws of so fixed a nature. It is consequently easy to separate the various styles into well-defined groups, with easily recognized peculiarities, and to trace the sequences of development in themselves quite certain, which, when a date can be affixed to one of the series, render the entire chronology certain and intelligible.”

Thus from being ‘wonders’, semi-autonomous fields for aesthetic and philosophical contemplation in the romantic travelogue, architectural antiquities become ‘scientific’ objects, their autonomy relinquished for the higher purposes of science and history (in the late 19th century history is a science). In this process of objectification, the objects are ‘comprehended’ in an oversimplified version of what are really qualitative experiences thrown up in the process of encounter. Thus reduced and neutralized, these experiential qualities are then projected onto the object, and become ossified as essential attributes of the object.

The following excerpts give some indication of how the qualitative, aesthetic experience of architecture, as expressed in the romantic travelogue of the early 19th century are neutralized at the level of affect and transformed into empirical attributes of the object in colonial archaeology. John Seely (see previous chapter), in his description of Ellora, begins with an account of the picturesqueness of its rural setting. This is contrasted, in subsequent pages by the ‘variety, monumentality and sublimity’ of the excavations themselves, which evoke feelings of “awe, wonder, and delight, that at first is painful...”

“Everything here invites the mind to contemplation, and every surrounding object reminds it of a remote period, and a mighty people...” The remote and obscure history of the artefact-in-its-setting is matched, in Seely’s imagination, by the sublime nature of ‘the labour, skill and patience displayed by the artificers of the caves in executing their almost superhuman task’.

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29Ibid., 2.
31Ibid., 107.
Compare this narrative with the following excerpts from Fergusson’s description of the ‘Kylas’ at Ellora: “…at Ellora, a pit was dug around the temple in the sloping side of the hill, about hundred ft. deep at its inmost side, and half the height at the entrance or gopura, the floor of this pit being 150 ft. wide and 270 ft in length.” In Fergusson’s ‘approach’ to Kailasa, the aesthetic experience of monumentality in Seely’s account has an exact mathematical correlate. The ‘remote period’ of Seely has a chronological correlate and turns out to be not so remote after all. “If …it were necessary to fix on a date which should correctly represent our current knowledge of the age of the Kylas, I would put down A.D. 800, with considerable confidence....” Fergusson’s statement clears the history of Ellora of its mysterious remoteness and quite matter-of-factly exorcises the ghosts of the ‘mighty people’ who are supposed to have excavated it.

Finally, Fergusson attempts to clear the ‘considerable misconception’ about ‘the apparently prodigious amount of labour bestowed’ on the excavation:

In reality…it is considerably easier and less expensive to excavate a temple than to build one. Take, for instance, the Kylas....To excavate the area on which it stands would require the removal of about 100,000 cubic yards of rock…the question simply is …whether it is easier to chip away 50,000 yards of rock, and shoot it to a spoil…down a hillside, or to quarry 50,000 cubic yards of stone, remove it…a mile at least to the place where the temple is to be built, and then to raise and set it. The excavating process would probably cost about one-tenth of the other.

The labour, skill and patience that Seely deems ‘superhuman’ are also convertible into a numerical cost-benefit analysis, which renders the task very human and ordinary indeed. By thus minimizing and rationalizing the contribution of human agency in the process of excavation, Fergusson

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32 Fergusson, History of Indian and Eastern Architecture, 355.
33 Colonial archaeological site-reports traditionally locate a site in terms of latitude-longitude, geographical landmarks, distance in miles from nearest town, etc; a parodic numerical-factual version of their “picturesque” counterparts in romantic travelogues. This trend persists in today’s official site-guide books issued by the ASI.
34 James Fergusson, History of Indian and Eastern Architecture, 338.
35 Ibid.
dismantles and ‘shoots to a spoil’ the last bastion of sublimity and wonder that the temple is capable of exciting in its viewers.

In a fascinating reassessment of the concept of reification from a recognition-theoretical view, Axel Honneth extrapolates from his interpretation of Georg Lukacs’ theory of reification in capitalist societies. He reads Lukacs’ concept of ‘engaged praxis’ alongside Martin Heidegger’s notion of “care” or sorge, with interesting results. According to Honneth, reification “correspondingly signifies a habit of thought, a habitually ossified perspective, which, when taken up by the subject, leads not only to the loss of its capacity for empathetic engagement but also to the world’s loss of its qualitatively disclosed character.”

In order to demonstrate that the recognitional stance has a categorical priority over a neutral cognition of reality, Honneth brings a third insight – John Dewey’s critique of the ‘spectator model of knowledge’ - into the equation.

Just like Lukács and Heidegger, Dewey is also skeptical of the traditional view according to which our primary relationship to the world is constituted by a neutral confrontation with an object to be understood. Although he neither uses the concept of “reification” to characterize this doctrine nor shares the pathos of Heidegger’s worldview, as far as the phenomenon that he is describing is concerned, Dewey agrees with these two thinkers that the predominance of the subject-object model cannot help but leave its impression on society’s conception of itself. He asserts with Heidegger and Lukács that the longer we hold on to the traditional opposition of subject and object, the more our life practices will be damaged, since cognition and feelings, theory and practice, science and art will thereby be more and more torn apart.

Dewey, according to Honneth, deploys uses the concept of ‘practical involvement’ “to demonstrate that we can succeed in rationally breaking down and analyzing an experienced situation only by detaching ourselves

37 Ibid., 119
38 Ibid., 110.
from the qualitative unity of this situation, by distancing ourselves from this experience.”

The analytic components that we require in order to deal intellectually with a problem of action result from the reflexive attempt to separate retroactively the components that we have experienced in their unity as part of a single qualitative experience. Only at this point, when we secondarily “process” a situation by dissecting it into emotional and cognitive elements, can we distill an object of cognition, which the acting individual can then encounter as an affectively neutral subject. This subject can now employ the whole of its attention, which had previously been fully “lost” in the act of immediate experience, as cognitive energy toward the intellectual handling of a problem that, as the object of the subject’s attention, banishes all other situational elements to the background. However, Dewey never fails to emphasize that the primordial, qualitative content of experience cannot be allowed simply to vanish in this cognitive process of abstraction; otherwise, the harmful fiction of a merely existing object—of a mere “given”—may emerge.39

Unlike the antiquities frame of the Jones era that clearly separated ‘all that is produced by nature’ from ‘all that is performed by man’ and aligned antiquities (along with civil history) with the latter, the 19th century archaeological frame treats its objects to a spurious methodology imported from natural history. Johannes Fabian points out the epistemologically crucial distinction between two dominant categories of objects in colonial anthropology – ‘ethnic artefacts’ and ‘ethnographic objects’.

One could decide to treat artefact and object as synonyms, but the two terms may actually signal quite different discourses. As I understand it, artefact, etymologically and in its practical connotations, is essentially a narrative and often an aesthetic concept; narrative, in that an artefact is a thing that tells the history of its production and aesthetic, in that it was made by, or

39Ibid., 111-112.
with, art. Artefacts are things that belong to culture rather than nature; they are, to use another deep rooted distinction, the business of *Geisteswissenschaften* rather than *Naturwissenschaften*. Now, and this is the point where matters get complicated and interesting, there can be no doubt that things called ethnographic objects – artefacts by their nature – were, within the paradigms of emerging anthropology (evolutionism and diffusionism, the warring twins), treated as objects of the kind science needs in order to operate its methods. They were studied by a discipline, ethnology, that may have thought of itself as a Kulturwissenschaft, but adopted methodologies that had their origins in positivist “natural history”. Spatial distribution and taxonomic classification dominated the agendas of research and theorizing about culture.⁴⁰

To treat artefacts (definitionally, objects made or modified by human beings) as if they were facts of nature is to deny their origins and persistence in purposive activity, in material and symbolic practices that surrounded them at their point of origin and at subsequent times. Colonial archaeology, however, is concerned with physical objects and their connections with similar objects; in this object saturated world there are no spaces for troubling ‘native’ subjectivities – both in their originary contexts and in subsequent ones. As physical bumps in the landscape, mutely bearing traces of India’s past, archaeology’s objects are exempted from carrying ‘culture’, or having ‘truth value’ in more than an evidentiary sense.

In its objectification, the archaeological specimen begins to bear an uncanny resemblance to the ‘commodity’ as characterized by Georg Lukacs, in his seminal 1923 essay titled “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat”.⁴¹ Abstracted from its ecological and socio-cultural contexts, its artefactual origins denied, it floats free of the social networks that produced and sustained it, an undifferentiated member of a species of similar specimens. Neutralized and rationalized through archaeological documentation, it acquires a ‘phantom objectivity’ which renders it commensurable with other specimens on the prefabricated

taxonomic/chronological table. Its various values and functions throughout its multiple lives (ritual, communicative, pragmatic, symbolic, artistic and aesthetic, for example) are overwhelmed by a single ‘exchange value’ – that of colonialist history. Perhaps another characteristic of the Marxist definition of the commodity within capitalist systems, the fact that the commodity is owned by the employer who is not the producer, is also relevant here. The ideal archaeological specimen was owned by the colonial state – initially at on an epistemological plane. Eventually, however, the ownership was extended, by means of a series of legislations, government orders and acquisitions, to the physical/legal level.

SECTION II: THE TRANSITION FROM DOCUMENTS TO MONUMENTS

In this section I will deal with the re-contextualization of the de-contextualized archaeological objects within the official colonialist version of history and its re-aestheticization in the late 19th century. The institutional spaces of the colonial museum and the monument site and the discourse of colonialist art history are the sites where this re-contextualization and re-aestheticization take place.

Artefacts in Limbo

While coins and inscriptions were considered valuable ‘documents of history’ and collected, facsimiled and copied systematically, colonial archaeology in its pre-imperial avatar was, I propose, somewhat ambivalent about the ontological status of non-literary antiquities. Archaeological field reports reflect a kind of urgency in the need to ‘fix’ these objects through documentation before they deteriorate. Prinsep’s inability to see the Allahabad column for its inscriptions is a case in point: it deserves to be quoted again in this context:

Aware indeed that the only accurate data we possessed for adjusting the chronology of Indian princes were those derived from ancient monuments of stone; inscriptions on rocks and caves; or grants of land engraven on copper-plates, discovered accidentally in various parts of the country;—I could not see the highly curious
column lying at Allahabad, falling to rapid decay, without wishing to preserve a complete copy of its several inscriptions.... It is indeed greatly to be regretted that the task was not accomplished twenty or thirty years ago; for the ravages of time, or rather climate, have probably in that short period committed greater injuries on its surface, than during an equal number of centuries antecedent....

Prinsep goes on to analyse the effect of the rain, sun and salt that leads to the flaking of sandstone buildings in Benares and “indeed all over the country”. He continues, referring to the Allahabad column, “We have however before us what remains at this time of its interesting contents, and must hasten to make them known for the satisfaction of the antiquarian and the Sanscrit scholar.”

W.J.T. Mitchell uses the term ‘bad objects’ as a metaphor for three kinds of objects produced by colonial discourses – totems, fetishes and idols – which are activated/animated in the course of the colonial encounter. Mitchell’s borrows the concept from the object relations theory of Kleinian psychoanalysis. ‘Bad objects’, in Mitchell’s interpretation, are not straightforwardly ‘bad’ in the moral sense, “but bad in the sense of producing a disturbance, uncertainty, and ambivalence in a subject.” They demand to “be neutralized, merely tolerated or destroyed.” Non-literary antiquities function as ‘bad objects’ throughout the colonial period, sometimes mutilated (by the ‘Portuguese’ according to British reports), stolen by ‘barrow-hunting’ collectors, neutralized into scientific specimens by the archaeological frame before they are appropriated physically by the Imperial government and judged and evaluated in colonialist art history in terms of ‘art’ and ‘non-art’. Interestingly, this ambivalence is most noticeable between the 1820’s and the 1860’s. Even as colonial archaeology established epistemological authority over these recalcitrant ‘documents of history’, there are indications

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42Prinsep “Note on Inscription No. 1of the Allahabad Column,” *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (Bishop’s College Press, 1834), 114.

43Ibid


that these artefacts exist in a kind of ontological limbo before they were systematically appropriated for display in the newly established museums and monument sites of the Imperial government.

In 1797, Mackenzie was conducting a topographic survey of Guntur district when some unusual antiquities at the village of Amaresvaram were brought to his notice.\textsuperscript{46} When the surveyor examined the site, he found a large circular trench 10ft. in diameter, revealing masonry, slabs and some bas reliefs. Mackenzie entered a brief description of the site and some sculptural fragments in his journal and this was supplemented by sketches of available sculptures made by his delineator.

Returning to document the site in 1816, Mackenzie found it greatly damaged, its stone having been mined for lime and building material. Spending over four months at Amaravati, Mackenzie and his delineators made maps, plans and eighty meticulously finished drawings of the sculptures. Copies of these were sent to Madras, Calcutta and London along with some pieces of sculpture. In 1830, the Collector of Musalapatnam installed some fragments in the new marketplace of his town. In 1835, the Governor of Madras chanced upon them and ordered that they be shipped to the Literary Society in Madras. In 1840, another large consignment of Amaravati sculptures was sent to Madras by the Commissioner of Guntur, there to gather dust in a store till 1854. In 1857 -58, the Madras sculptures (renamed Elliot Marbles) were shipped to London, where they spent winter, exposed to the elements in a dockyard. Finally, in 1866, James Fergusson tracked them down to a London coach house and excavated them from under piles of metropolitan detritus, reconstructing what he could of the \textit{stupa} for display at the Paris Exposition of 1867.

The tale of Mackenzie’s ‘discovery’, the subsequent native vandalism and colonial neglect of the Amaravati fragments in the first half of the 19th and their final resurrection by Fergusson is narrated in several writings in the latter half of the century – most notably in Fergusson’s own 1860’s article in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.\textsuperscript{47} Even within the colonial recounting,

\textsuperscript{46}45. Major C. Mackenzie “Account of the Jains: Extracts of a Journal,”\textit{Asiatick Researches}, Vol 9, 272–298.

it served as a moral allegory with several lessons – the dedication of Mackenzie, native ignorance and rapacity, the short-sightedness of colonial rule between the 1830’s and 50’s, the selfless heroism and unimpeachable scholarship of Fergusson. I retain the allegorical function of the story here, but more narrowly, as illustrative of the colonial ambivalence towards visual antiquities before the Imperial era. However, the Amaravati example is not an isolated instance of this ambivalence.

Further support for this ambivalence emerges when we consider the contrast between the pre-1860’s colonial attitude towards Amaravati and Cunningham’s excavation of the Bharhut stupa between 1874 and 1876. The meticulous attention paid to the excavation process, the thorough descriptive documentation of each fragment assembled in archaeological reconstruction and the immediate transfer of the bulk of the finds to the Indian Museum at Calcutta are detailed in Cunningham’s 1879 monograph - *The Stupa at Bharhut*. By this time, a clear-cut archaeological policy towards ‘monuments’ was in place, ensuring that the Amaravati debacle was never repeated, especially where ancient Buddhist monuments were involved.

Responding to charges that the translocation of the Bharhut fragments carried with it ‘a certain aroma of vandalism [fancy carting away Stonehenge!]’, Cunningham insisted that this prompt action was what saved the artefacts from being vandalized. The debate in this case was not whether the artefacts should be conserved or left alone to fall gracefully into decay; but whether museumization was better than *in situ* conservation. Clearly, in the forty-odd years between Prinsep’s inability to see the Allahabad lat for its inscriptions (see above) and this sophisticated conservation debate of the 1870’s, a shift in paradigm had occurred in the colonial perception of artefactual remains in India. The invoking of Stonehenge, the *ur* monument of British nationhood, reiterates this change in attitude. A brief review of changing colonial attitudes towards endangered and decaying artefacts serves to foreground this shift in paradigm.

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Documentation as a proxy for conservation.

In the ‘romantic’ travel writings of the late 18\textsuperscript{th} and early 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries, ruin and desolation were treated as value-additions to the sublime-picturesque qualities of ancient remains. Ruin and desolation frequently inspired moral reflection. The more humanist-philosophical of these writers inclined towards an Ozymandias-like meditation on the ephemeral nature of human effort, human vanity. Shades of Babel and Christian triumph over heathen folly flavoured other accounts (see Chapter I).

Inevitably, these sentiments spilled over into the more rigorous antiquities researches of the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century where the ‘ravages of tropical climate’, the ‘bigotry of the Moslem’ and the ‘apathy and ignorance of the Hindoo’ were hypostasized into the destructive triumvirate responsible for the decay of ancient remains in India. From William Chambers (on Mamallapuram) in the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century to Lord Curzon in the early 20th, colonial writers repeat this argument with great regularity, occasionally adding Portuguese xenophobia (Goldingham– on Elephanta) and British callousness/ overzealouness (Fergusson – on rock-cut temples) to the list.

In the reports of William Chambers and his contemporaries, a recurring component is a faithful but detached record of the ‘state of preservation’ of antiquities examined; conspicuously absent is the note of urgency which later writings strike, on the need to document thoroughly before all is lost. If fact, ‘state of preservation’ observations served a heuristic function in ‘antiquities’ writings, providing the authors with a rough index of the age of the remains. However, while Chambers is content to speculate on the causes of destruction, colonial archaeologists of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century approached the problem as if it were a call to action.

In the early part of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, Colebrooke was critical of the colonial practice of carting away inscriptions, ‘to Europe, before they had been sufficiently examined, or before they were accurately copied and translated’, to be placed ‘beyond the reach of reference ...to be there buried in some publick museum or private collection.’ Colebrooke’s protest did not spring from any ‘ecological’ argument about leaving Indian antiquities where they belonged; rather, it was the inconvenience that this move posed ‘to persons engaged in researches into Indian literature and antiquities’ that he
regretted. The ‘careful preservation’ and ‘diligent examination’ of old inscriptions was most definitely a means to an end, the end being ‘the illustration of the civil or literary history of the country’. For this task, originals were desirable but a good facsimile was considered a passable substitute.\textsuperscript{49}

The necessity of recording ephemeral phenomena for scientific purposes before they vanished from view was the guiding principle for archaeological research throughout the second quarter of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. A few sporadic governmental interventions apart, the documentation of artefacts was mostly conducted by amateurs, on their own initiative and without consolidation. It is significant that the 1862 Minute on the Antiquities of Upper India, issued by Lord Canning (the communication leading directly to the formation of the Archaeological Survey of India) continues to prioritize documentation, documentation as a reasonable proxy for conservation and restoration, given budgetary limitations. Remarking on colonial neglect of architectural remains, Lord Canning clarifies:

\begin{quote}
By ‘neglect’ I do not mean only the omission to repair them, or even arrest their decay; for this would be a task which...would require an expenditure of labour and money far greater than any Government of India could reasonably bestow upon it.

But so far as the Government is concerned, there has been neglect of a much cheaper duty, -that of investigating and placing on record, for the instruction of future generations, many particulars that may still be rescued from oblivion, and throw light on the history of Britain’s great dependency.\textsuperscript{50}
\end{quote}

By ‘future generations’ Lord Canning means of course, not Indians, but ‘the intelligent and enquiring classes in European countries’. The message is clear; the conservation-as-documentation exercise was to be systematized and made available, as an archive, to researchers and scholars working in metropolitan centres in Europe. The archive would function as a necessary


\textsuperscript{50}Lord Canning’s Minute reproduced in Appendix I of Chakrabarti, \textit{A History of Indian Archaeology}, 220.
and sufficient substitute for the objects themselves, the majority of which were inaccessible to these scholars and beyond conserving physically.

The Conservation debate before 1860

Early pleas for actual material conservation of artefacts came from scholars in London and prominent ‘free-lancers’, not attached to the colonial bureaucracy, like James Fergusson. In a paper titled ‘On the Rock-Cut Temples of India’, read at the Royal Asiatic Society in 1843, Fergusson concludes with a recommendation for the cleaning and preservation of several important rock-cut edifices including Karle, Udayagiri-Khandagiri, Ellora, Kanheri, Elephanta, Karle and Ajanta, underlining the fact that it was Ajanta that most required urgent attention.51 Fergusson’s recommendations seem to be targeted at the prevention of further damage to these sites, evacuating ‘squatters’ wherever possible and rendering them accessible to Europeans in India – from ‘picnic-parties’ to researchers. In 1845, the Government of India made arrangements for the clearing and preservation of both Ajanta and Ellora (then within the Nizam’s dominions) along with the delineation of twenty-four of the ‘most interesting and celebrated’ caves and antiquities in the area.52

Between the 1830’s and 1860’s, museums in India functioned as repositories for portable fragments recovered from different sites. The original museological function of accumulation of objects for scientific purposes (rendering these artefacts accessible to European researchers) was supplemented by a new imperative– that of ‘safe-keeping.’53 However, the British had no qualms about carting away a selection of fragments to London. In 1847, an official despatch from the Directors recommended that a judicious collection of moveable fragments be made from different presidencies, with a view to shipping them to the Company’s museum at London.54 What needs to be emphasized here is that till the 1860’s, both the documentation and early conservation arguments were made with European

54Sundar, Patrons and Philistines, 76.
interests in mind; ‘conservation’ in whatever form was pursued to aid the work of scholars and historians in the metropole. The role of colonial functionaries in India was perceived largely in terms of facilitating the collection and transmission of ‘data’ to be ‘processed’ in London and other European centres.

**SECTION III: MONUMENTS AND MUSEUMIZATION : A NEW PARADIGM**

This insight brings into focus the paradigmatic nature of the opening of the first museum in Calcutta to the public, the ‘monumentalization’ of antiquities *in situ* in the last quarter of the 19th century, and various policies to prevent the physical transportation of material artefacts that followed. What were the factors that precipitated this new concern for the durability of historical artefacts, given the enormous logistics and expenditure that preservation and conservation entailed? What sort of expansion or transformation did the archaeological frame undergo in order to accommodate this new acknowledgement of the material presence of historical artefacts and the novel mandate for their display? What imperatives propelled the new acknowledgement of their material presence, their novel access to ‘presentability’ to a largely native viewership? Most intriguingly, why were these policies and institutional support systems rapidly put in place shortly after the Revolt? Consequently, what shift in ontological status, in value, did the objects themselves suffer in their transfiguration from scientific specimens – ‘documents of history’ – to autonomous monuments and musealia?

The answer to these questions lies, I suggest, in the overhauling of ideological state apparatuses that the revolt necessitated, and the new politics of incorporation that was to become a hallmark of the Imperial government. Both monumentalization and museumization are aspects of the new policy of visibility championed by the British Raj, contiguous with other spectacular displays of power – Victorian *durbars* that mimicked the overthrown Mughal court, the invention of Indo-Saracenic architecture and
the grandiloquent expositions of Indian arts and manufactures in European cities.\textsuperscript{55}

**The British Raj and the Rhetoric of Power**

The official discourses surrounding the new Imperial policy for the preservation of monuments and the public display of antiquities are unhelpful when it comes to unearthing the ideological motivations behind this move. Almost without exception, they are couched in terms of ‘enlightened custodianship’ and the didactic function of museum display.\textsuperscript{56} I see it as significant that the landmark Indian Treasure Trove Act of 1878 and its follow-up directives coincided with the establishment of the first public museum in Calcutta, and the official recognition of *in situ* conservation as a policy for select monuments. When these are viewed as contiguous performative acts within the same discursive arena, it is plausible that physical/legal *ownership* of antiquities was a pre-condition for their exposure to the public gaze. What the Treasure Trove act achieved was, at least in principle, a *neutralization* of the commodity-value of artefacts by withdrawing them from circulation in the market. Through this exclusionary move, the Imperial government cornered legal access to antiquities, and set the stage for transforming the authority exercised by colonial archaeology over antiquities, so far restricted to the epistemological level, into something like *objectified cultural capital*.\textsuperscript{57} This was entirely in consonance with the rearticulation of power within the early British Raj – power exercised in the form of cultural hegemony, seeking alternative legitimacies through its elaborate rituals and structures of inclusion, incorporation, exclusion and

\textsuperscript{55}From the 1980’s onwards, scholars like Thomas Metcalf, Carol Breckenridge, Paul Greenhalgh and Arindam Dutta have engaged extensively with various aspects of the rhetoric of the spectacle during the British Raj. Tapati Guha-Thakurta and Kavitha Singh have made important contributions to our understanding of the politics of museumization and monumentalization of historical artefacts during the colonial period and its aftermath.\textsuperscript{56} Lord Lytton’s Minute of January 1878 is one example of this Imperial rhetoric: “the preservation of the national antiquities ought not to be left to the charge of the local Governments, which may not always be alive to the importance of such a duty….I cannot conceive of any claims upon the administrative and financial resources of the Supreme Government more essentially *Imperial* than this [emphasis added.].” Lord Lytton’s Minute quoted in Sundar, op. cit., 82. A similar argument is made by Lord Curzon in his speech (1900) “On Ancient Monuments in India”, reproduced in Appendix II of Chakrabarti, op. cit., 227-236.

civilizational ‘difference’. “In conceptual terms, the British, who started their rule as ‘outsiders’, became ‘insiders’ by vesting in their monarch the sovereignty of India through the Government of India act of 8 November 1858.”

The epistemological appropriation of historical artefacts, represented by the archaeological archive, was an inadequate signifier for the symbolic appropriation of India’s past, not least because access to the archive was limited to a small enclave of scholars in India and in Europe. It was only with the systematic material appropriation of these objects by the Imperial government that the symbolic appropriation could be elaborately staged for the benefit of native subjects. Like the legendary Zam-Zammah in Kipling’s *Kim*, ownership of the historical artefacts of India’s past was ownership of India’s past – a space from which the British were historically excluded.

It is in this context that the ‘altruism’ that apparently inspired in situ conservation policies and the opening of the Calcutta museum to the native public – loses its liberal innocence. By insisting that Indian antiquities be retained on Indian soil, as heritage to be restored and displayed for the edification of Indian subjects, the Imperial government was actually commandeering the tangible, visually compelling material presence of these objects to cement the permanence of British rule. Had these artefacts been carted away to England, their rhetorical potential as instruments of power would have been frittered away. They would have regressed to the status of ‘mere objects’ in museums or private collections, curiosities for the scientifically inclined, aesthetic objects for the artistically inclined or loot, plain and simple. On Indian soil, ‘restituted’ to the native populace, restored to a semblance of their former glory, these artefacts were powerfully polysemic. While ostensibly pointing to India’s glorious past, they were even more potent as symbols of its Imperial present. They symbolized simultaneously the impartiality of Imperial rule, its concern for the improvement and education of subjects, its impeccable standards of aesthetic

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59 Cohn’s “Representing Authority...” stresses the material dimension of the Victorian symbolization of authority. He details the rituals of the Victorian durbars which involved elaborate, hierarchically ordered prescriptions for physical presentation, retinue, arms, regalia, gifts, presentations of insignia, *nazar* and so on, a mimicry of Mughal durbars. Ibid., 195–209.
judgment and its unimpeachable mastery over Indian history. They were, in other words, object lessons in the virtuousness and necessity of Imperial rule.

The instrumental motivation behind this material/symbolic appropriation of India’s past will be illuminated further when we analyze how it was staged. I will examine two major axes along which this staging was performed – the aesthetic and the historical. After a conspicuous absence in both the antiquities and archaeological frames, the issue of aesthetics makes a significant entry in conservation discourses in the 1970’s. When he was appointed Director-General of Archaeology, Alexander Cunningham’s brief was to undertake “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 [emphasis added].” The invocation of ‘beauty’ as a criterion or justification for conservation, which makes a frequent appearance in conservation discourses of the late 19th and early 20th century, was perhaps legitimized by a precedent from another area of colonial interest – the widespread aesthetic appreciation of Indian decorative arts in Europe from 1851. At one level, it was the intrinsic artisanal excellence of some of these artefacts that made them worthy of preservation. Fergusson’s distinction between ‘the technic’ art of architecture and the ‘higher phonetic arts’ of sculpture and painting clearly aligns the intrinsic aesthetic value of his historical artefacts with the decorative arts. At another, more significant level, the aesthetic discourse was an acknowledgement of the ‘presentability’ of these artefacts for public viewing, of their potential ‘visuality’, as mediated and choreographed by the Imperial regime.

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61 James Fergusson, History of Indian and Eastern Architecture Forming the Third Volume of the ..., 1876, 35.
62 This resonates with Norman Bryson’s definition of visuality, cited in my introduction: “Between subject and the world is inserted the entire sum of discourses which make up visuality, that cultural construct, and make visuality different from vision, the notion of unmediated visual experience.” Norman Bryson, “The Gaze in An Expanded Field,” in Hal Foster (ed.), Vision and Visuality (Bay Press, 1988), 91–92.
In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson writes:

Monumental archaeology, increasingly linked to tourism, allowed the state to appear as the guardian of generalized, but also local, Tradition. The old sacred sites were to be incorporated into the map of the colony, and their ancient prestige (which, if this had disappeared, as it often had, the state would attempt to revive) draped around the mappers. This paradoxical situation is nicely illustrated by the fact that the reconstructed monuments often had smartly laid-out lawns around them, and always explanatory tablets, complete with datings, planted here and there. Moreover, they were to be kept empty of people, except for perambulatory tourists (no religious ceremonies or pilgrimages, so far as possible). Museumized this way, they were repositioned as regalia for a secular colonial state.\(^{63}\)

It is interesting that in their staging of the *in situ* monument, the conservation experts revive (a slightly parodic version of) the aesthetics of the Picturesque. The monument is ‘unjungled’- cleared of extraneous vegetation that would obstruct carefully anticipated views or create structural instability. ‘Squatters’, however picturesque, are evicted because their use of the monument is considered defiling and inappropriate to its higher aims. Manicured lawns and disciplined shrubs contribute to an orderly version of the Picturesque. Finally, the monument itself is preserved in a state of arrested decay – modern architectural restorations are prescribed only if the structural integrity of the monument is at stake and these are to be conspicuously modern.

In a classic essay titled "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and its Origin", Alois Riegl distinguishes between different kinds of value attached to what he terms ‘unintentional monuments’, monuments reclaimed by the modern cult of monuments.\(^{64}\) Two dominant modern values attached to these monuments are age value and historical value; these are often in conflict with each other when conservation policies are to be decided. Age value,

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which Riegl insists is the more recent phenomenon, is an offshoot of modern historical consciousness and puts a premium on the object’s capacity to reflect the passage of time. Proponents of age-value would therefore insist on the monument being left alone to decay through natural processes as they consider this an organic part of its identity, a value-addition to its visual properties. In other words even though they would, in principle, oppose deliberate, violent destruction of monuments by human agency, they also oppose conservation as we understand it. Proponents of historical-value, on the other hand, see the monument as a document of a particular moment or event in history, and are concerned with arresting its decay, primarily through preventive conservation. “Age value appreciates the past for itself while historical value singles out one moment in the developmental continuum of the past and places it before our eyes as if it belonged to the present.”

Imperial conservation policies reflect a complicated negotiation between age-value and historical value in their attempt to freeze the object in a state of arrested decay, retaining its value as a document, even as they invoke the Picturesque aesthetic by framing the monument in a landscaped setting. The proliferation of casts, photographs and conjectural restorations, popular as scientific substitutes for the original in museums and colonialist texts during this period, attests to their importance as historical documents, reflecting their point of origin at a particular historical moment. Both ‘use value’ and ‘newness value’, which might have had greater appeal for the native population, are definitively cancelled out by conservation policies.

Ultimately, historical value emerged triumphant. The conservation and display of monuments and musealia, both ex- and in situ, were entirely mediated by the official colonialist version of history – through signposts and labels detailing the historical moment of origin of each of these objects, their provenance, through the chronological arrangement of museum displays, through elaborate pedagogical and scholarly supplements like catalogues, displayed photographs, casts and art history texts. The wondering gaze of the native subject, it was hoped, would eventually be chastened and

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65 Ibid., 38.
66 Ibid., 39, 42.
disciplined to perceive the displayed objects through the more appropriate frame of history. Stephen Greenblatt characterizes wonder as ‘the power of the displayed object to stop the viewer in his or her tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke exalted attention.’ What the policies of display hoped to achieve was a carefully orchestrated historical resonance, resonance being ‘the power of the displayed object to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged and for which it might be taken by the viewer to stand.’

The framing of exhibits via colonialist history dovetailed with the larger Imperial ambition of producing disciplined and appreciative subjects who, it was hoped, could be persuaded to give up their fanciful and inappropriate ‘appropriations’ of visual displays. This attempt at interpellation was doomed to failure; the conflict between the museum as a purveyor of properly scientific knowledge conducive to colonial rule and the museum as a ‘wonder house’ for the undisciplined native gaze was never resolved throughout the colonial period.

The timing of the large scale monumentalization and museumization of historical artefacts across the subcontinent takes on a new significance when it is seen in the light of the disciplining, regulatory ambitions of colonialist history. In their contribution to The Handbook of Material Culture, Michael Rowlands and Christopher Tilley summarize the various recent theories that have linked the monumentalizing of the past with history, memory and the politics of identity.

Monuments and memorials exist as a means of fixing history. They provide stability and a degree of permanence through the collective remembering of an event, person or sacrifice around which public rites can be organized. This is a fairly straightforward understanding of why tangible heritages of objects, archives, museums, monuments and memorials exist in order to make us believe in the permanence of identity. Moreover, following Nora's now classic work on lieux de memoires, these sites of memory are

consciously held ideas of the past, constructed usually in the midst of upheaval (Nora 1989). The rise of national memory emerged in Europe in the midst of a crisis of authority. The foundation of the Louvre museum in 1793 belongs to a revolutionary era in France, whose agents, in the midst of upheaval, needed to fashion a stable image of the past. As Lowenthal suggests, the projection of an image of permanence on to a landscape serves to deny the realities of change (Lowenthal 1985). As history destroys the capacity for ‘real memories’, Nora argued that it constructs instead sites of memory as a social and encompassing symbiosis maintained through objects and performances (cf. Nora 1989; Connerton 1989). He draws attention to the alienated status of memory in modern times: an estrangement concretized in monuments, museums and sites of memory (Maleuvre 1999: 59).69

I propose that the staging of in situ monuments and museum displays in the immediate aftermath of the revolt for the native public was one among many ways by which the colonial government sought to stabilize and objectify Indian identity in relation to its past. The census and ethnographic surveys were other late nineteenth century institutions which sought to achieve a similar objectification in the sociological sphere. However, the display of artefacts was not meant to merely resurrect and reanimate what Pierre Nora terms ‘milieux de memoire’, ‘real environments of memory’ that would reconnect the native subjects with their past in some unmediated fashion. Thoroughly decontextualized by the archaeological frame, monuments and museum displays were defined by the heavy textual overlay that slotted them by region and time period, a supposedly ‘objective’ history that ‘belongs to everyone and to no one’. In Nora’s words, history “is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it.”70

Authoritatively framed by colonialist history, the displayed artefacts were immunized against the potentially anarchic myths, memories and identity constructs of individual communities and social groups that might accumulate

around them. It was fortuitous for the State that many of the collected artefacts were old and abandoned, their original meanings forgotten or ‘misinterpreted’ by the local populace. As empty shells, they could be injected with a new significance, and be resurrected to proclaim the ordered rationality of hegemonic colonialist history.

Stripped of their local associations and usages, framed by an alien and alienating history, distanced from the present by that same history, incarcerated in vitrines, behind guardrails and the ubiquitous ‘protected monument’ boards, these objects were surely stamped with an inviolable ‘otherness’ for native viewers. Even the in situ monument, declaring its autonomy through a powerful material presence, relinquished this autonomy at the level of signification. Colonialist recontextualization intervened to insert a metonymic/synechdochic relationship between the objects and their ‘proper’ context – that is, the past as reconstructed in colonialist historiography.

The aesthetics of the arrested decay, both in the monument site and in museums, had an allegorical function quite apart from the scientific interest in preserving ‘documents of history’ without unnecessary intervention. The objects’ fractured material presence, the signs of disintegration, the fragmentary forms of museum exhibits, their abdication from ‘use value’ - these combined to perform a powerful symbolic/concrete demonstration of the dominant meta-narrative of colonialist historiography – the subject nation’s inexorable fall from a glorious past to an abject present. Their overwhelming material presence was an ironic signifier for a resounding absence.

**Recontextualization and the first colonialist art histories**

James Fergusson’s authoritative *History of Architecture in India and the East* combines the teleology of decline with a typology of race as the context against which the corpus of historical artefacts can be periodized and interpreted. Fergusson’s survey must be viewed against the background of a generalized anxiety among the intelligentsia in Victorian Britain about the decline of local craft traditions in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. By

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contrast, the crafts and manufactures of India had been elevated to exemplary status after the widespread appreciation they received during the Crystal Palace exhibition in London, in 1851. This was followed by a sense of urgency to protect and promote Indian industry, which was itself beginning to show signs of decline. Fergusson’s text is interesting in that it is formulated at the crossroads of three distinct discourses; the post-1851 aesthetic reception of Indian design and skill, the sterner mid-nineteenth century discourse of colonial archaeology with its myopic focus on morphology, taxonomy and chronology, and finally, the late 19th century discourse of race and racial difference as essential and biologically determined.

Fergusson’s cavil against the European architecture of his time, particularly the revivalisms that convulsed Britain, was that it was influenced by a ‘false system’; the result was an ‘anomalous and abnormal’ practice. In India, on the other hand, architecture was ‘a living art’; here one could encounter the ‘real principles of art in action’. Fergusson’s predilection for ornamental architecture is evident throughout the text and he sometimes flounders trying to reconcile his personal aesthetic with the 19th century art historical mandate that read ornament as a sign of decline. Fergusson represents Indian architectural aesthetics as definitively ‘Other’, its “forms utterly dissimilar from those we have hitherto been conversant with”. Fergusson justifies his scopophilic enchantment with this ‘Other’ with an essentialist, racially determined version of the humanist argument. “By rising to this wider range we shall perceive that architecture is as many-sided as human nature itself…” He recommends the study of Indian architecture both as a corrective measure that would broaden the critical horizons of contemporary architecture in Europe. A very similar argument was made in the context of Indian crafts during this period.

This reveals the ontological status that Indian architectural art occupies within Fergusson’s text. The concept of Art with a capital ‘A’ lay at the very centre of discourses about civilization and racial difference in the late nineteenth century. Every culture which claimed a position high on the ladder of civilization had to demonstrate that it cultivated Fine Arts, as a sign of its

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72 Ibid., 5.
73 Ibid., 404.
moral and intellectual advancement. Consequently, it was important for colonial powers to deny that the arts of the colonized people could aspire to Fine Art status. Fergusson complies with this mandate by ranking Indian architecture with the lesser arts – crafts, manufactures, industrial or mechanical arts.\textsuperscript{74}

The characteristics of Indian architectural art in this text are: 1) The art of architecture is passed on traditionally, ‘its principles practiced almost mechanically’ by even uneducated, native subjects. An identical argument is advanced by George Birdwood, the champion of industrial arts, for whom the native artist, with his ‘great genius for imitation’, however ‘seldom rises above the traditions of his art.’\textsuperscript{75} 2) Unlike the ‘higher arts’ of sculpture and painting, which immediately reflect political decline, architecture may ‘linger on amidst much political decay’.\textsuperscript{76} Here Fergusson clears a space for his detailed analysis of Indian architecture through centuries of decadent polity even as he buttresses the teleology of decline as a justification for colonial rule. 3) The notion of creative agency, which had disappeared in the archaeological discourse, stages a comeback in colonialist art history. Fergusson borrows the reified figure of the ‘native craftsman’ from the arts-and-manufactures discourse and invokes it from time to time as the efficient cause of Indian architecture. The native artist/craftsman is reduced to a timeless entity, a passive body through which tradition channels and replicates itself in material form. Even though ‘uneducated’, with no access to individuation or individual excellence, the Indian craftsman embodies ‘patient industry’. As Deepali Dewan demonstrates, the ‘native artist/craftsman’ is a colonial construct standing both for the anonymous collectivity he represents and for the work he produces.\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{74}This mandate is tediously upheld by all Imperial commentators from Birdwood, a contemporary of Fergusson and impresario of the Industrial Arts of India, to Vincent Smith, an early twentieth century historian of India who used the ‘fine art’ ‘not fine art’ distinction as a weapon of offence against the claims of nationalist art historians. See G. C. M. Birdwood, \textit{The Arts of India} (Rupa, 1988); Vincent A. Smith, \textit{A History of Fine Art in Indian & Ceylon} (Oxford University Press, 1930).

\textsuperscript{75}Birdwood, \textit{The Arts of India}, 131–134.

\textsuperscript{76}James Fergusson, \textit{History of Indian and Eastern Architecture}, 1876, 35.

\textsuperscript{77}The imperialist construction of the “native craftsman” as a source both of the salvation of Indian arts and its corruption is analysed in some detail by Deepali Dewan. Dewan “The Body at Work” in James H. Mills and Satadru Sen (eds.), \textit{Confronting the Body: The Politics of Physicality in Colonial and Post-colonial India} (Anthem Press, 2004), 118–134; and Dewan,
In Fergusson’s reading, the craftsman, left to himself, is capable of ceaselessly reproducing traditional good design, as intellect does not intervene in the process. However, because of his lack of true agency and judgment, both intellectual and moral, his work is prone to display the corruption of his times. 4) Finally Indian art as a whole suffers from this moral and intellectual degeneration. Fergusson compares the Hullabid (Halebidu) temple with the Parthenon, and surprisingly, the comparison is not unfavourable. The Parthenon is as sternly intellectual as the Hoysala example is its antithesis, exhibiting ‘a joyous exuberance of fancy’.\textsuperscript{78} However, the author is forced to conclude, Hullabid being a late instance of Hoysala temples, its sculpture is degenerate. Here Fergusson emulates the archaeological frame in his tendency to dissect the object into ‘architecture’, ‘ornamental sculpture’ ‘figurative sculpture’; to segregate architectural form from meaning and function. “Sculpture in India...[has] that curious Indian peculiarity of being written in decay”.\textsuperscript{79} Sculpture and painting, according to him “can only be successfully cultivated where a higher moral and intellectual standard prevails than...is at present to be found in India”.\textsuperscript{80} Moral and intellectual degeneracy is a genetic flaw among Indians, according to Fergusson, brought about by millennia of miscegenation and misrule, to be ameliorated only by firm colonial control. He uses this argument repeatedly in his extended diatribes against Babu Rajendralal Mitra.\textsuperscript{81}

The contrast between the sweeping normative and moralistic statements with which Fergusson punctuates his text and his distinctly archaeological approach to description and stylistic analysis is a source of interesting contradictions. Brief passages of description mimic the objective archaeological narrative, detailing material, measurements, plan, structural elements and decorative features. Aesthetic judgments are profuse at the level of stylistic comparisons; they are deeply normative and prescriptive, but disguise themselves as ‘objective’ and commonsensical. Fergusson’s periodization combines available information on political history with region-
based cluster analysis. What ultimately stitches the narrative together in a diachronic continuum is the theory of decline. Fergusson sees decline everywhere, microcosmically in regional clusters and overall, on a global chronological scale. Ultimately, aesthetics in Fergusson’s text emerges as a function of that categorical Imperial meta-narrative, the teleology of decline.\textsuperscript{82}

Another fascinating contradiction appears at the margins of Fergusson’s text, in the illustrations.\textsuperscript{83} While the plans, diagrams and some illustrations detailing pillar orders conform to the archaeological modality, the woodcuts showing elevations partake of the conventions of Picturesque painting. The buildings are represented in oblique view, their forms illuminated by unidirectional light. Details of ruin are carefully delineated and no attempt is made to ‘restore’ the lacunae conjecturally. Vegetation rendered in a naturalistic mode, sets off the monuments, echoing their intricate patterns of light and shade, even springing irrepressibly from amongst the fallen stones. Here and there, a ‘native’ figure appears in the middle ground, ostensibly to establish a sense of scale. Most of these woodcuts were made from photographs and studies show that the practice of photography during this period was powerfully influenced by ‘painterly’ conventions. However, what I want to highlight is the effect that these illustrations have within the text, the semiotic function they perform. Juxtaposed with the archaeological plans and diagrams, they resonate with the display strategies that structured \textit{in situ} conservation of monuments in India. The play between monument as scientific object, an array of architectural elements, and monument as picturesque ruin is replicated in Fergusson’s text. Left out of the representation are other possible interpretations of architectural artefacts, in terms its intended function and meaning, for example.\textsuperscript{84} One important point

\textsuperscript{82}It is instructive to contrast this with Jouveau-Dubreuil’s non-normative approach in \textit{Dravidian Architecture}.

\textsuperscript{83}For an interesting analysis of Fergusson’s earlier “Picturesque” inclinations, see Guha-Thakurta, “The Empire and its Antiquities,” in \textit{Monuments, Objects, Histories}, 5–14.

\textsuperscript{84}In an article comparing English and Indian understandings of architecture, Tillotson compares painted representations of Indian monuments by Hodges and the Daniells with those of 18th and 19th century Indian artists. He concludes that the Indian representations are less aesthetic that functionalist in their approach, and closer to the “intended meaning” of the structures they represent. “Painting and Understanding Mughal Architecture,” Giles H. R.
of difference is that unlike the in situ monument, Fergusson’s survey is not targeted primarily at a native Indian audience. Its implied reader is presumably a European or an Anglicized Indian. This makes the ‘picturesque’ intervention more intriguing. It mitigates the abstraction and coldness of the archaeological mode by presenting the objects as visually attractive and definitively ‘Other’. It purports to expose the reader to an aesthetics of these objects that is, however, specifically English, specifically colonial. The presence of the native in the frame adds definition to this ‘Otherness’ – the native becomes an ethnographic marker.\textsuperscript{85}

If archaeological description and illustrations foreground the objects in sharp focus and history is the diorama against which stylistic changes appear, the biological theory of race is the proscenium which frames the entire action. The concept of race, central to the Victorian ordering of the non-European world, hardened into a discourse about essential difference after the Revolt. The decisive decoupling of language and race took place in the late 1850’s, just as Darwin’s evolutionary theory became available for appropriation into the new biological ‘science of race’.\textsuperscript{86} The consummation of the new relationship between biology and race resulted in what Thomas Trautmann terms the ‘racial theory of Indian civilization’. In keeping with this theory, Fergusson sees India as occupied by five successive waves of biologically distinct races. The Dasyus, a tree and serpent worshipping people ‘of a very inferior intellectual capacity’ and the Dravidians or Turanians, intellectually situated between the Dasyus and the Aryans, were the pre-historic occupants of the subcontinent. From Central Asia, the virile, fair-skinned Sanscrit-speaking Aryans (strikingly similar in this text to Victorian Britons), invaded India from the Upper Indus region; of the highest intellectual rank in their ‘pure’ state, they lost their status due to miscegenation with the other races. The Aryan conquest was followed, in more recent times, the ‘Mohammedans’ and finally the British.\textsuperscript{87} Each of these races left traces of their distinct intellectual capacities and moral aspirations in the form of different art and

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\textsuperscript{86}Thomas R. Trautman, \textit{Aryans And British India} (Yoda Press, 2004), 191.

\textsuperscript{87}Fergusson, \textit{History of Indian and Eastern Architecture}, 1876, 9–14.
architectural forms found in India. Fergusson constructs a series of architectural styles - the Northern, the Dravidian, the Chalukyan, and the ‘Indian Saracenic’, which corresponds more or less, with these historical immigrations. The cause-effect connections between Fergusson’s stylistic categories and racial groups are left undefined. External signs and gross pathology are sufficient for diagnosis.

Fergusson’s reified racial categories provide an ideal foil for the reified objects of the archaeological frame – at a synchronic level, the archaeological typology of objects bears an indexial relationship with racial types. At a diachronic level, history and chronology set the stage for the theme of decline. Taken together, history and race are compelling justifications for the perpetuation of racial difference and colonial rule. Fergusson constructs a powerful image of the Indian subcontinent as a kind of quagmire that engulfs and emasculates all those who settle on the land, a quagmire that is characterized by a one-way flow. Each wave of immigration or invasion brings in a influx of fresh ideas and capacities, flowing typically from West to East, only to be caught up in the downward descent that is the inexorable rhythm of the subcontinent.

**CODA: OBJECTIVISM AND ALLOCHRONISM**

It is my contention that the colonial archaeological frame, the museum paradigm, and the first colonialist art histories, along with the neighbouring discourse of Industrial arts have left behind several structural residues that continue to influence the practice of pre-modern art history today. Of these residues, I pick out three significant tendencies which have persisted despite changed contexts of reception and interpretation. The first is art history’s objectivist paradigm – a legacy of the archaeological frame that derives from the epistemology of natural history in the 19th century. Objectivism comprises a realist ontology – reality as a realm of objects that have an existence independent of the knower, and an epistemological position – the knowing subject can, from a position of externality, increasingly approach the real nature of the object. Colonial objectivism haunts the historiography of pre-
modern Indian art in many recognizable forms, in the inherited typological and generic categories that frequently go unexamined, in the separation of complex material manifestations into architecture, sculpture and painting, in formal descriptions, in stylistic comparisons, in iconographic analysis which treats meaning as inherent in the object, and overall, in the lack of epistemological reflexivity that characterizes the mainstream text. With the introduction of iconology, semiotics, narratology and other recent historicist and contextualist approaches, the interpretation of meaning has become increasingly sophisticated and takes seriously the inter-subjective context within which meaning is produced. However, formal analysis remains the most troubling locus of objectivism because formal descriptions rarely factor in the embodied viewer. Form is treated either as a property of the object, or as a vehicle of meaning.

Another legacy of colonialist paradigms manifests in the way mainstream texts lock their objects in the past and align them overwhelmingly with their original contexts of production and reception. The object and its originary context are made authenticate each other so completely that subsequent and contemporary contexts of the objects being, its presence and reception seem like inauthentic add-ons, contaminating the pristine historicity of the object. Here too, the split between form and interpretation comes into play. Slotting the object within a developmental account of style disposes of its historicity at the level of form. Interpretation is more complex and typically involves a combination of hermeneutics and social, political and cultural contextualization – all focused on the originary context. As a result, the discipline of art history tacitly acknowledges only one temporality for the objects’ being. Their presence in the present is beholden, not only causally, but ontologically, to their relationship with the past.

The colonial imperative to deny anything but a colonial present for these objects, to treat them as ‘documents of history’, has already been examined in the previous sections. Johannes Fabian invents the term ‘allochronism’ to refer to a conceptual strategy of evolutionary anthropology in the 19th century to deny coevalness to the colonized peoples. Allochronism is a denial of a dialectical relationship between the subject and objects of knowledge that operates on the temporal axis. The object is deprived of its agency to
occupy and act in the same temporal space as the observing subject.\footnote{Johannes Fabian, \textit{Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object} (Columbia Univers. Press, 2002), 32.} Fabian is dealing primarily with racial distancing in \textit{Time and the Other} and his conceptualization of ‘chronopolitics’ relates to relations between colonizers and the colonized peoples. It might seem somewhat farfetched to apply the concept of temporal distancing to inanimate objects which originated in the past and are therefore essentially historical. However, the moment we frame objects as art, we are acknowledging their contemporaneity, both their being in and their aesthetic value for, the present, this apart from their relationship to their originary contexts. In my opinion, the fact that mainstream art history persists in treating pre-modern Indian art objects as tokens of a type, as events in a stylistic or historical continuum, as embodiments or vehicles of some ancient meaning, as products of historical patronage or as ‘heritage’, but rarely as aesthetic objects in their own right, highlights the fact that the residues of colonialist allochronism continue to linger on unexamined. Allochronism comes more sharply into focus when we consider the discursive institutional, and economic divides that separate modern and contemporary Indian art from ‘traditional’ arts like Madhubani painting and dhokra sculpture.