Beyond Representations:
Photographs in Archaeological Knowledge

Más allá de las representaciones:
fotografías en el conocimiento arquéologico

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Abstract

In attending to the intervention of photography within archaeological practices in South Asia the article reckons with the material which is a photograph, and its social materiality within constructs of archaeological knowledge. It draws attention to creations of evidentiary domains and their shifting representations. Visual histories permit disciplinary introspection by facilitating reflexive praxis. They encourage us to think of the ways in which we historicise the past, write about histories of archaeological practices, and establish notions of evidence. By highlighting the unique agency of photographs and their collections through their multiple life histories, the aims here are to demonstrate the importance of engaging with issues of historiography, and the dominant ontology of the visual in sustaining archaeological intent, both of which are often glossed over by theorists of archaeology.

Key words: *Photographs. Archives. Saliency. Social biography. Visuality.*

Resumen

Tomando como referencia el uso de fotografías en la arqueologia del sudeste asiático, el presente articulo examina el papel que juega la materialidad de las fotografías en el conocimiento arqueológico. En particular, se examina la creación de diferentes tipos de evidencias y de sus cambiantes representaciones. Se argumenta que las historias visuales permiten la introspección disciplinaria al facilitar una práctica reflexiva. Dichas historias nos animan a pensar en las diferentes maneras que tenemos de historizar el pasado, escribir sobre la historia de la práctica arqueológica y establecer evidencias arqueológicas. Insistiendo en la especificidad de las fotografías y de sus colecciones a través de multiples historias de vida, mi objetivo en este artículo es demostrar la importancia de participar en debates historiográficos así como en controversias relativas a la ontología dominante de lo visual, habitualmente glosados por los téoricos de la arqueologia.

Palabras clave: *Fotografías. Archivos. Prominencia. Biografía social. Visualidad.*

1. Introduction

The endeavours towards greater introspection and reflexivity within the archaeological scholarship in these post 'post-processual' times accompany the refashioning of the explorations of the agency of things by reaching out to the experiential and cognitive. In part-emualtion and part-critique of the highly influential volume on social anthropology and cultural studies, *The Social life of things* (1986), archaeologists gave a call, albeit more than a decade after the publication, for investing into the cognitive lives of things through theories such as 'Material Entanglement' that would demonstrate the 'interface between cognition and material culture' and present the 'richness of expression and variation of the human mind *through* the material world' (Malafouris and Renfrew 2010: 2, italics theirs). The growing archaeological scholarship of the agency of things roots the importance of reckoning with the material rather than materiality, and encourages the anayses of 'relationships between humans and things from the point of view of things' (Hodder 2012: 10). Claiming a move out of the cartesian dualism of mind and matter, this new research orientation hopes at bringing into consciousness the 'fact' that archaeology is about things, and encourages archaeologists to envisage their 'charge' as 'respectfully to return to things' (Olsen, Shanks, Webmoor and Witmore 2012: 7). Through aspects of archaeology's visual histories, and by reckoning with photographs and their collections that are attributed with archaeological meaning, this article on aspects of archaeological practices in South Asia engages with issues of ontology that bear upon the creations of visuality, and which allow a 'feel' for the archaeological discourse. In exploring the agency of photographs as things, it draws attention to the manner in which notions of archaeological evidence are fixed and constituted, and predicates the shifts and transformations of evidentiary terrains through time.

If we reckon with cognition and vision we would notice that over the last two decades the sensory experience of seeing has been creatively explored by archaeologists through evaluations of the relationships between archaeological topographies and their inhabitants and creators (e.g. Molyneaux 1997, Fejfer, Fischer-Hansen and Rathje 2003, Brodie and Hills 2004, Renfrew, Gosden and DeMarrais 2004). This research on vision and its interventions within the archaeological epistemology derives much inspiration from the thrust towards the study of materiality within disciplines such as social anthropology, history of science, sociology and cultural history (see Buchli 2002, for examples of

pioneering research). Theories regarding 'visualisation in archaeology' (e.g. www.viarch.org.uk) has opened up new areas of enquiries on the 'politics of vision' (Thomas 1993), nature of 'gaze' (e.g. Duncan 1993), 'visual essences' of past encounters (e.g. Frieman and Gillings 2007), legacies of 'embodied materiality' (e.g. Meskell 2005), the status vision as a sensory perception (e.g. Ouzman 2001), and of 'things in translation' (Olsen, Shanks, Webmoor and Witmore 2012). The privileging of sight as a 'sense of reason' within archaeological theories has also by now produced a fair share of criticism from archaeologists who explore the visual for noting the biases of a 'western' historiography that continues to build upon the cultural heritage of European Enlightenment (e.g. Hamilakis 2002, but see Poole 2005). Yet with rare exceptions (e.g. Baird 2011), the bulk of research on visualisation within the discipline remains bereft of analyses regarding the manner in which the visual mediates within selections of 'raw data'. Thus, the dictum 'to see hence to know', which promised antiquarian research the means of securing relatively objective histories from landscapes and artefacts as opposed to information from historical manuscripts and other texts, is rarely appraised by practitioners in its nurture of archaeological evidence.

One casuality of the above neglect is the overlook of the unique agency of photographs and their collections as creators of archaeological knowledge. Even within the cognitively conscious new archaeological literature we find the visual and digital explored as aspects of media, and often received in a profane manner as allowing archaeologists to negotiate with the material worlds (Olsen, Shanks, Webmoor and Witmore ibid). In this respect, although Michael Shank's essay on 'Photography and Archaeology' (1997) may come across as an early exception, it conveys the neglect rather clearly. Shanks had declared that 'photographs are powerful rhetorical instruments in establishing objectivity'. Although, in celebrating the epistemic value of *photoworks* he eroded the social saliency of photographs to something which, to quote his own rhetoric, 'cannot be encapsulated within verbal description' (1997: 73, 101, italics his). As Deborah Poole has convincingly demonstrated the same year as Shanks's article was published, photographs acquire vastly different meanings through their myriad performances. Through research on the nineteenth-and early-twentieth-century-photographs of 'races' from Peru, Poole highlighted the domain of visual economy, or rather the 'cultural and discursive systems' through which photographs 'are appraised, interpreted and assigned historical, scientific and aesthetic worth', and she

carefully explained why 'it becomes important to ask not what specific images *mean*, but rather how [they] accrue value' (Poole 1997: 8–10). The different agencies of photographs vis-à-vis other materials of visual inscriptions, such as lithographs and drawings, in framing and sustaining discursive regimes, which Poole, and subsequently Geoffrey Batchen have illustrated in detail, calls for an approach towards photographs as artefacts with a 'social dimension [and] a dynamic web of exchanges and functions that gives them a grounded but never static identity' (Batchen 2002: 78). In recalling Shanks's pioneering article we can convincingly state that the generic category of *photoworks* as a suitable representation of the myriad visual artefacts of archaeological knowledge masks the uniqueness of photographs as historically potent objects.

In recent years the intervention of photography within archaeology has been reviewed by the visual historian of Mesopotamian archaeology Frederick Bohrer, for establishing a metaphor for archaeological practices, which he deems as being expressive of the human mind in its questions and probing. By giving meaning to the idea of excavating an imagination Bohrer has drawn attention to the epistemic shifts induced by photography and described by Walter Benjamin as transforming the dominance of the auratic to that of the non-auratic. Thus, Bohrer has documented the intervention of photography in establishing the semantic grounds for experiencing the past, and he finds that photography compliments the archaeological quest by 'going beyond (and beneath) an artifact's superficial appearance in order to capture what is deemed most valuable in it' (Bohrer 2005: 184). A brief foray into the photographic creations of archaeological realities in this article would hopefully offer possibilities of gauging the tactility of such metaphors by allowing a view of the photograph, not photography, within the making of archaeological episteme.

Moreover, as 'fixers' of knowledge, photographs and their archives facilitate expositions and memorialisations of meanings, and in this they allow the dismissal of all shades of positivist claims which are being increasingly made within the context of South Asian archaeology regarding the 'truth-making' value of the archaeological science (e.g. Chakrabarti 2006: 475). Histories of photography's 'disturbance', to follow Roland Barthes, reveal the constituents and shifts within notions of evidence (2000 [1980]: 12), and in taking cognisance of the photographs of archaeology we are able to build upon methodologies for evaluating notions of evidence that are established through archaeological practices.

2. Visual Memory: Photography and Archaeology

Photography's refashioning of archaeology's epistemological terrains during the ninteenth century allows a recall of the grand proclamation of the eighteenth-century antiquarian William Stukeley (1687–1765) that 'antiquarian research is lame without illustrations or drawings' (quoted in Piggott 1978:1). The new technologies of photography aided archaeology, the newest of the Victorian sciences, for establishing and making transparent its knowledge making processes. And the sumptuous reports of the excavations at Cranborne Chase in Dorset, England (between 1880 and 1897), conveys the foundational importance of the 'proper' ways of seeing, for illustrating the systematic practices of archaeological fieldwork, in order to secure visibility of the distinctions between archaeological excavations and explorations and the looting which was routinely undertaken by booty hunters. General Augustus Henry Lane Fox Pitt Rivers, who directed the excavations, remains one of the founding figures of the excavation methodology, and his adamance that 'every details should … be recorded in the manner most conducive to facility of reference' (1887: xviii) illuminate the captions of the photographs within the reports through which he directed the readers' vision regarding what to notice and see. This is rather transparent in the label for Plate 255 of the 1898 volume, which states that 'the photograph is to show the right side of the excavation […] A, B, C is the black mark of the old surface line…the shovel near A is leaning against the side of the trench enclosure' (Pitt Rivers 1898: facing page 80).

At the beginning of the twentieth century such attempts at 'capturing' the eye was formalised as a useful practice through the seminal book on the *Methods and Aims in Archaeology*, which was authored by William Matthew Flinders Petrie (1904). Petrie placed emphasis on the importance of nurturing visual memory, and held the belief that 'of all inherent material qualifications there is perhaps none more essential to a digger than this permanent picture of a site' (ibid: 91). In the book, he demonstrated the importance of placing the reader in 'possession of all the facts and materials' and provided detailed instructions for 'the orderly arrangement of the material in plates' within archaeological literature (ibid: 114–6). Such crafting of visual memories through the literature that relates to practices of field archaeology continue to dominate the showcasing of its proper and scientific conduct.

3. Visual histories and South Asian archaeology

The logic of seeing and knowing which informed antiquarian scholarship served the British in their

framing of India's civilisational history. The force of vision remained, for approximately two hundred years an important vector within British negotiations of the antiquity of a land whose 'civil history' they found to be, to quote the eighteenth-century British orientalist Sir William Jones, 'a cloud of fables' (1788: 421). Vision performed the same tasks as those that were delegated to historical enquiry by the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century antiquaries of Britain and Continental Europe, namely, 'to separate falsehood from truth, and tradition from evidence, to establish what had probability for its basis, or to explode what rested only on the vanity of the inventors and propagators' (*Archaeologia* 1770: i). Within the context of the Indian subcontinent, or Hindustan, the genealogy of the antiquarian eye was developed by the European travellers of the sixteenth century through drawings and paintings of things Indian, and this subsequently framed the picturesque views of the cities and towns on the river Ganga and Central India that were drawn and painted by William Hodges.

Hodges was the first British professional painter to visit Hindustan, between 1780 and 1783, and in the introduction of his retrospective travelogue he explicitly stated that his sketches and paintings were 'plain observations, noted down upon the spot in the simple garb of truth without the smallest embellishment from fiction, or from fancy' (1793: iv). This representational logic was to root photography's launch of archaeological practices from the 1850s, initially for collecting information regarding India's architectural heritage. The aesthetics of the sublime which characterised the work of Hodges permeated the manner in which western antiquaries received their Indian subjects of study. Thus, in describing the caves of Kanheri and Elephanta (near Bombay), the Scottish antiquarian Hector McNeil, who had seen them in 1783, wrote:

> Be this as it may, the grand cave of Cannara must ever be considered by the man of taste as an object of beauty and sublimity, and by the antiquary and philosopher as one of the most
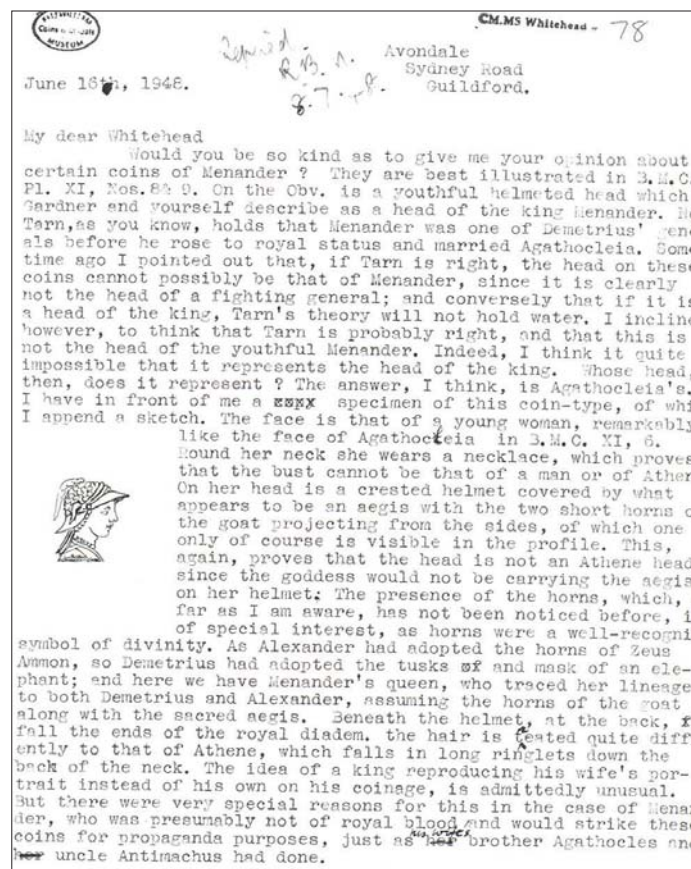

Figure 1a. Letter, Sir John Marshall to R.B. Whitehead (16 June 1948). Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.
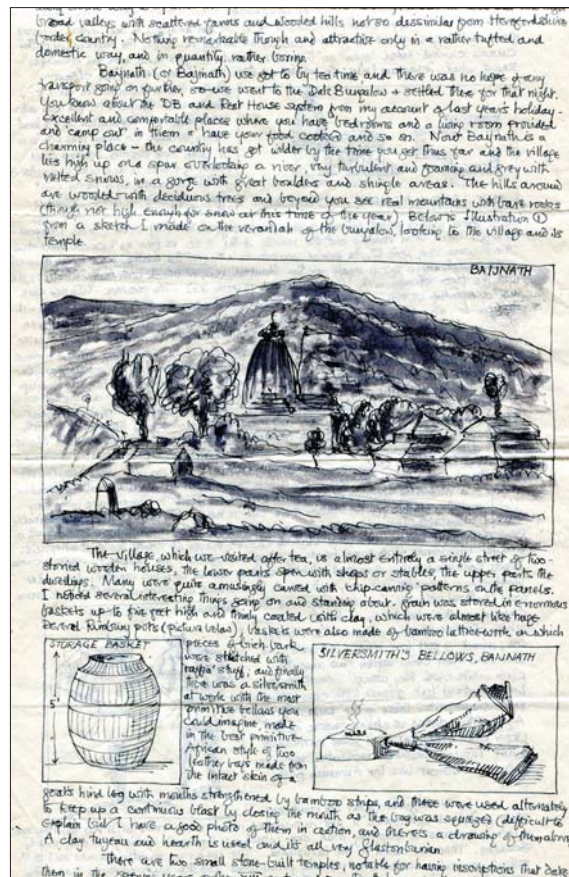
Figure 1b. Letter, Stuart Piggott to Peggy, 5 October 1943, Air Headquarters, New Delhi, India. Archives of the Institute of Archaeology, Oxford.

valuable monuments of antiquity. … Indeed, where I desirous to spin out my description, the cave of Elephanta might furnish ample food for the most ravenous antiquary. Every part teems with human forms; every wall seems to move with life obedient to the will of the artist, who seems *Saxa movere fono testudinis, et prece blanda, Ducere quo vellet* (1786: 260, 275).

The nineteenth-century photographs of the decaying Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim monuments of India, which make up the genre of the picturesque and inundate the archives of the archaeological surveys of India, are usually received by historians of photography and South Asia as representations of the colonial gaze on an ancient civilization in visible ruins. Yet, as Mac Neil's above remark suggests such photographs can also be historicised within a particular narrative tradition of British and European antiquarian scholarship, in which the picturesque imbricate sights of the historical topography, and which encourage historiographic searches for

Indian archaeology beyond easy choices of the 'colonialist.'

The rooting of visual aesthetics within the antiquarian scholarship inevitably added to the value of visuality for decoding meanings for things that were excavated as 'unknown' or deemed subsequently as 'wrongly known.' Within the context of Indian archaeology examples abound in the illustrated letters of archaeologists, including the 'doyens' Alexander Cunningham (1814–'93), John Marshall (1876–1958), Stuart Piggott (1910–'96) and Mortimer Wheeler (1890–1976). Marshall's letter to R. B. Whitehead (figure 1a), conveys a common practice through which numismatic scholarship continues to be undertaken and developed. He challenged Whitehead's identification with his detailed drawing of the iconography which was embosssed on a series of Indo-Greek coins, and which he established as King Menander. Piggott's letter to his then wife Peggy (figure 1b), is a graphic description of the terrain he travelled through and explored

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while he served the RAF in India during the Second World War (1942–'46). The images which he drew and imbibed, especially of the social hierarchy, rituals and rural economy of northern India, subsequently shaped some of his inferences regarding the social aspects of prehistoric Europe.

4. Photographs and Indian archaeology

The overlapping realms of visual and archaeological evidence finds a resonance within two quotations that were printed on the title page of each of the twenty-three reports of the Archaeological Survey of India, regarding the explorations and excavations of Alexander Cunningham (Director and Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India from 1861–'65, and 1871–'85 respt.) and his staff, which were undertaken between 1862 and 1885. The first is a phrase from the Governor General of India Lord Canning's speech on the eve of the institution of the Archaeological Survey in 1861, enunciating his government's archaeological programme that 'what is aimed at is an accurate description, illustrated by plans, measurements, drawings, or photographs, and by copies of inscriptions, of such remains as most deserve notice, with the history of them so far as it may be traceable, and a record of the traditions that are preserved regarding them.' This was placed above the second quotation, dating from 1838, of a statement by the Secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, James Prinsep that 'what the learned world demand of us in India is to be quite certain of our data, to place the monumental record before them exactly as it now exists, and to interpret it faithfully and literally.' When read together as they were meant to be, the two quotations draw our attention not only to the emphasis that was placed upon seeking historical truths through archaeological surveys, but also upon the accuracy of presenting this work visually.

With respect to procedures on excavations, especially while they were in progress, the amateur nineteenth-century archaeologists of India, such as Robert Sewell, who excavated a stupa at Amravati (Karnataka) in 1877, felt the need for the presence of a draughtsman and photographer 'on the spot. 'One to take measurements, and mark the position of every marble as it comes to light; the other to stamp in permanence the general progress of the work in all its different stages, as well as to afford accurate information on the position of those stones which remain *in situ'* (1880: 8). A manuscript, seemingly in Sewell's hand, on the reverse of a photographic folio made up of photographs pasted in a series for establishing a panoramic view of the stupa site reads:

> 'This is a photograph of the complete circle of the middle of the circular mound, which is all that remains of the Buddhist stupa at Amravati on the river Krishna. It was taken section by section from the centre of the circle,
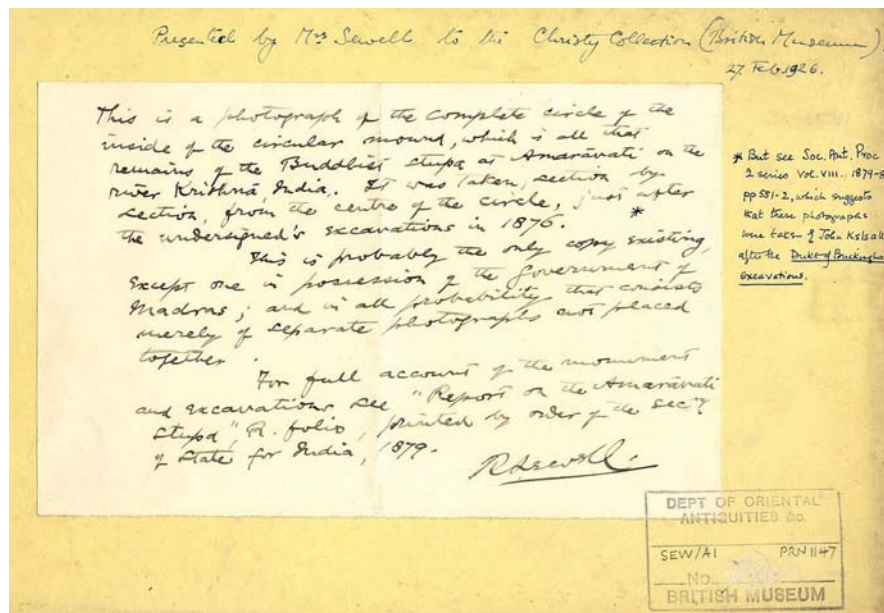

Figure 2. Note on reverse of folio with twelve albumen prints for panoramic display of stupa site, Amravati, ca. 1870s–1880s. The British Museum.
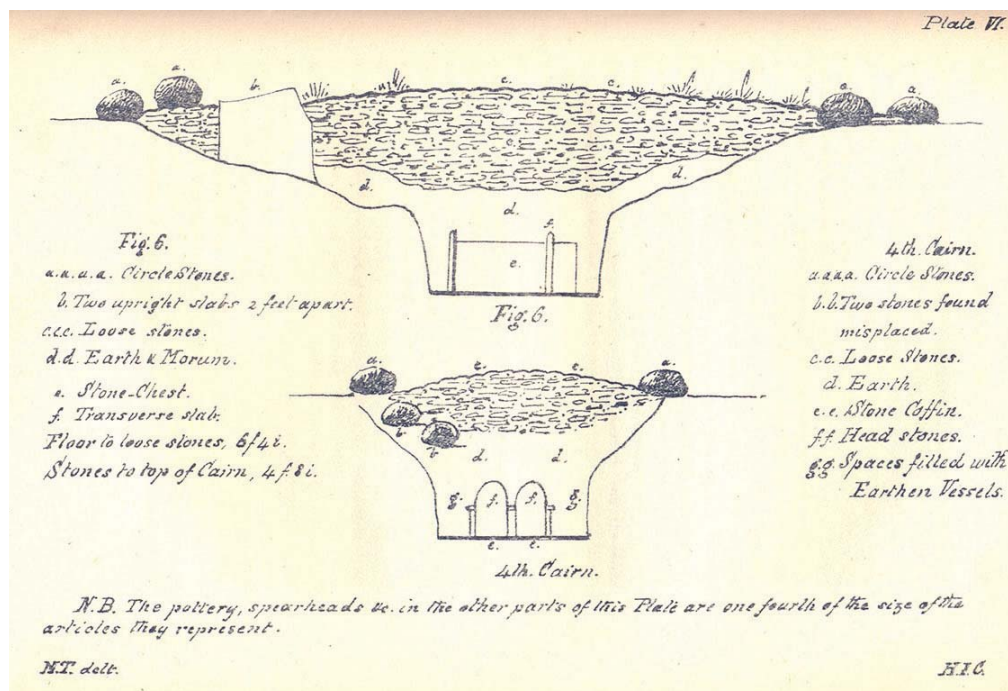
Figure 3. Drawing, section through large 'cairn' (megalith) excavated near Jiwarji, Meadows Taylor, ca. 1849–50, (Plate 6 in Taylor 1851).

just after the undersigned's excavation in 1876' (figure 2).

Although an accompanying note casts the authorship and the date of the above photographs in doubt—as it alerts to the fact that they may have been taken by John Kelsall during the Duke of Buckingham's excavations at Amravati in the 1880s—the inscription adds to the scroll's value as an accurate transcription of the field. Such transcriptions were consciously endeavoured from the middle of the nineteenth-century for showcasing the systematic conduct of archaeological fieldwork. However, we can also draw a robust genealogical lineage for photographs that came to represent the face of a professionalized archaeology by the mid-twentieth century within the nineteenth-century drawings that direct the eye to the objects found *in situ*. In this respect Phillip Meadows Taylor's corpus of drawings, of cromlechs, dolmens and stone circles, and objects and skulls shown partially emerging from the ground are pioneering creations (figure 3). Taylor undertook archaeological explorations of the Hyderabad State between the 1830s and 1850s, and we know from related archives that he had learnt to paint in India in 1825.

Not surprisingly, Taylor's initiatives in conveying the precision of his work visually, was lauded more than a century later by Mortimer Wheeler, the last Director General of the colonial Archaeological Survey (1944–48), who flaunted his own archaeological ventures in India as heralding proper methodologies and correct techniques of fieldwork. Wheeler resuscitated Taylor as the first 'to hint implicitly at the true function of the excavator and recorder', who 'drew and described sections which preserve an informative and convincing record of what he found.' With reference to the 'monumental sketches' of sections exposed at Harappa (figure 4), which preceded his own excavations at the site, Wheeler scathingly commented that 'it is sad to compare these caricatures of science with the admirable sketch-records of Meadows Taylor nearly a century earlier' (Wheeler 1956: 23 and 34). Wheeler's reception of Taylor's sketches highlights the conceptual watersheds that images of excavations have forged in distancing the professional from the profane.

The camera's inability in censoring the seepage of 'incidental details' through its lenses establishes photographs, to use Elizabeth Edwards phrase, as 'raw histories' (Edwards 2001), and we note that throughout the twentieth-century, efforts at constraining the leakage of details have added to formulations of methods regarding the requirements of archaeological photography. Such efforts
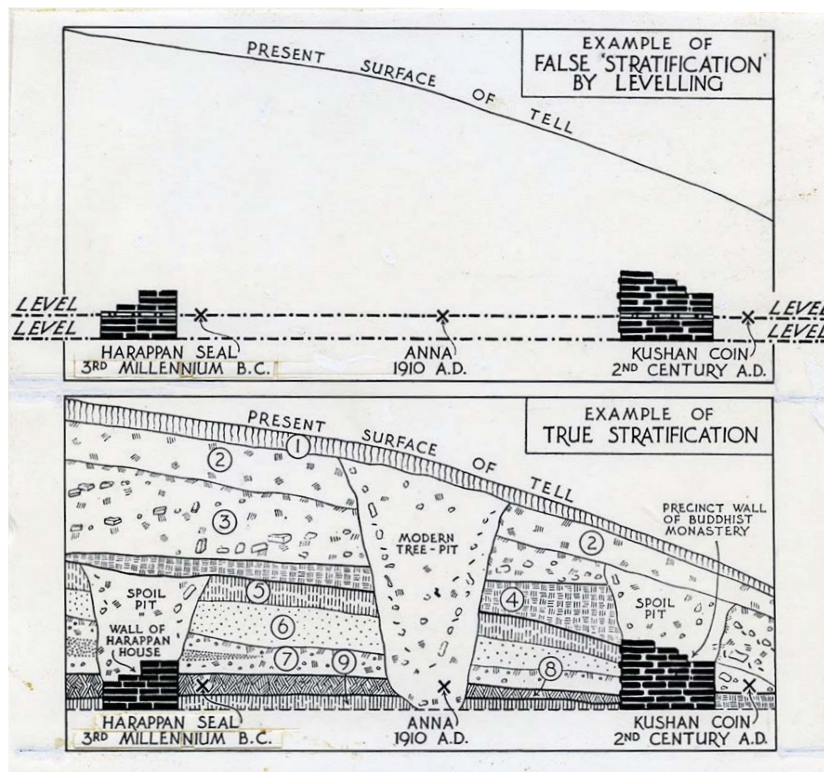
Figure 4. Drawing, captioned by Wheeler as 'Illustrating the stratification of a city mound (below) and the fallacy of recording mechanical levels (above)' in Wheeler 1956, figure 11.

are rather well documented in Wheeler's friend and photographer, M.B. Cookson's injunctions that 'no amount of mechanical skills [was] a substitute for the careful preparation of the subject.' Rules for archaeological photography bespoke of the correct ways of showing the subject, correct selections of photographic equipments, and correct developing, processing and publishing techniques. The splicing of excessive details for the photographic framing of 'orderliness and accuracy' co-incides with professional archaeology's growing concerns in inducing the 'camera to tell the truth' (Wheeler ibid: 200). Yet, despite attempts at taming the technology, photography's 'analytic mobility', which has been succinctly characterised as its innate capacity for scrutinising objects with limited visual access (Pinney 2010: 200), has always presented archaeologists, before and after Wheeler, with vast opportunities for refashioning their transcripts of transparency; both of their own work, and that of the past they unearth. As histories of consumption and circulation of photographs amply testify, visible realities of the material world are constantly recreated by inflections of meanings of photographs' indexical contiguity. Within British India, some of the best and early examples of this phenomeonon are the biographies of photographs of the 'Hindu' city of Banaras.

The excavations at Sarnath, near Banaras, during the cold seasons of 1834–'35 and 1835–'36 by Alexander Cunningham, explicitly demonstrate that the archaeological enquiries of the British in India did not follow grand discoveries, but were specifically aimed at establishing the force of the Buddhist religion within the cultural history of the ancient Hindu India (on this see Guha, 2012). Subsequent archaeological surveys of Banaras during 1863–'64 by the Christian missionary Matthew Attmore Sherring (and Charles Horne, a judge of the city), and Cunningham's seminal paper on the possible uses of archaeology in the *Benares Magazine* (1848) also reveal, contrary to the growing histories of South Asian archaeology (e.g. Singh 2004, Guha-Thakurta 2004), that those who committed themselves to 'Buddhist archaeology' during the nineteenth-century hoped for the success of 'future prospects [in] endeavours to convert the heathen of all denominations [within India] to the religion of Christ' (Cunningham 1848: 92). As the caption for

Figure 5. Lithograph, captioned 'The remains of a Buddhist shrine consisting of four handsomely carved pillars, standing on an ancient platform, with the usual Singhasun facing to the east', Muslim Graveyard, Bakariya Kund, Banaras, ca. 1863–4, photographer H.L. Frazer (Plate 2, Sherring and Horne 1865).

figure 5 illustrates, photographs were used for filling in the archaeological narratives of an absent Buddhist presence within the topography of this holiest of all the Hindu *tirthas* (pilgrim place). Such captions were aimed at establishing a scopic regime which 'when looking upon these extensive ruins [could not] fail to recall the time when they were frequented by crowds of priests and disciples of the Buddhist faith' (Sherring and Horne 1865: 11).

Thus, the truth-value of the archaeological discoveries of a Buddhist Banaras was affirmed through re-negotiations of photographic meanings, of which there are many examples (see Guha 2012a). The creations are indeed noteworthy for exploring the ways in which photography continues to serve Indian archaeology.

5. Collections of 'archaeological' photographs

The curatorial impulse towards creations of coherent collections allow many views of the reciprocities and exchanges that embed histories of photography and the birth of field sciences and professionalisation of disciplinary knowledge. With respect to the

British archaeology of India, two very distinctive archives of photographs inform of the shifting parameters of archaeological research. One was established in 1869, and remains at present in the British Library (London, Asia, Pacific and Africa Collection). This archive represents some of the earliest photographs of historical architecture, which were taken during the 'listing' of monuments, and depicts the nascent archaeological projects that were undertaken within South Asia between the 1850s and the 1880s. It presents the work of a vast array of amateur and professional photographers, and informs of the early history of photography in India which was launched at Calcutta in 1840 (figure 6a). The other, established in 1904, showcases the work of the Archaeological Survey of India, which was re-instituted in 1902, and placed under the leadership of John Marshall. This remains a growing archive, which is added to annually (figure 6b).

The architectural-cum-photographic documentation of ancient and medieval India was mooted as a 'Great Objective' by the East India Company in 1847, and was undertaken in a desultory fashion throughout the 1850s. The objective was officially

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Figure 6a. Asokan Pillar at Firoz Shah Kotla, New Delhi, Albumen print, Friths Series, ca. 1870.

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

confirmed as the seminal archaeological policy of the new raj in 1861 when a nominal office of the Archaeologial Survey of India was established at the behest of Alexander Cunningham. In 1867, the Government of India issued an official circular to local governments with instructions to prepare lists, accompanied by photographs, of all historical buildings within their jurisdiction. The circular led to a report on the *Illustration of the Archaic Architecture, &c., of India*, which was submitted to the government in 1869, on the eve of the first restitution of the Archaeological Survey, in 1871. Predicated upon the desire for establishing 'truthful delineation of structures of every description' through photographs, drawings, plans, sections, models and casts, the report prescribed the types and sizes of photographs to be made, the ideal vantage point of photographing buildings so that 'the operator [would take] his views from the points best calculated to ensure results of value', and the creation of duplicate photographic sets, one to be forwarded to the India Office, London, and the other to be retained in India, with instuctions that 'the negatives in all cases were to be sent to London' (Forbes Watson 1869: 1). Yet, despite the prescriptive onus on the correct gauging of the 'field' for the production
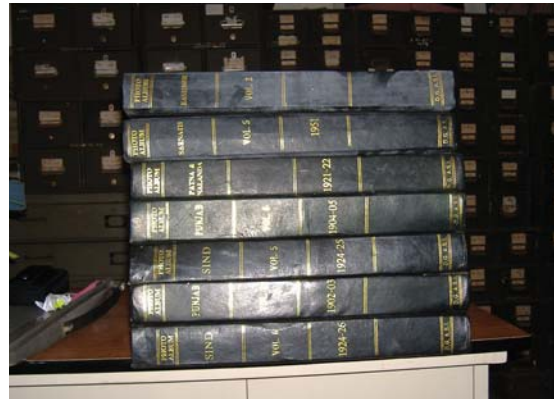
of accurate records of India's architectural history, the latter was to all extent pre-ordained through an essentialist scheme of classification that segregated monuments into religious classifications. This was firmly in place by the 1850s, and the 'eyewitness' accounts of the temples, stupas and mosques which were 'captured' through photography, made substantive contributions to notoriously inaccurate histories of their worship, ownerships, custodianships and uses.

The nature of the photographic archive that came into being through the circular of 1869 was vastly different from the exclusive DGA's (i.e. Director General of the Archaeological Survey) Photographic Collection which Marshall instituted in 1904 at Simla, at the headquarters of the Archaeological Survey (Guha 2010: 145–52). The tone of functionality which Marshall adopted regarding the collation of contents was remarkably different from that of Forbes Watson's. While the latter believed that the collection of photographs, plans and drawings of Indian monuments 'will probably constitute the most valuable work on art produced in the present century' (Forbes Watson 1869: 1), Marshall did not wish the photographs to be 'viewed as a single artistic whole' (Marshall 1904: 13). Rather, he created the archive to showcase the work undertaken by his office, viz., of the Director General of Archaeology. The photographs in the Collection, whose three decades of curatorial histories, between 1904 and '34, can be gleaned from the 'Proceedings' of the department of Archaeology and Epigraphy and the Survey's annual reports, were printed to select sizes, mounted usually two to a page, placed within albums, and annotated on the reverse with corresponding negative numbers, official stamps, and location details (figures 7a and 7b).
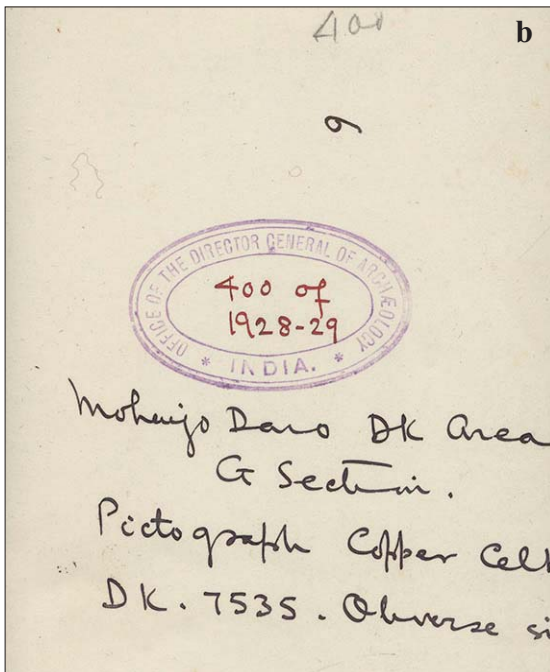
Figures 7a. and **7b.** Album page (A.61.HRG) and reverse of photograph (P.15927.HRG) from excavations at Mohenjodaro in 1925–26 and 1928–29 respectively. MAA.

Figure 7c. Photographs mounted on card and annotated within custom made drawers representing the Haddon Collection. MAA.

6. The Object that is a Photograph

Although unique in terms of their contents and biographies, the DGA's Photographic Collection compares in one significant way with the Haddon Photograph Collection at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge (henceforth

MAA, figure 7c, also Guha 2004: 16). Both confirm to that which Edwards has described for the latter; namely that 'the coherence and equivalence of the photographs was created through copying, printing and mounting them identically. … The standardized surfaces of the photographs and the unifying tonal range of the black and white glossy silver prints [engendered] uniformity, comparability– a mechanically controlled rather than mediated inscrip-
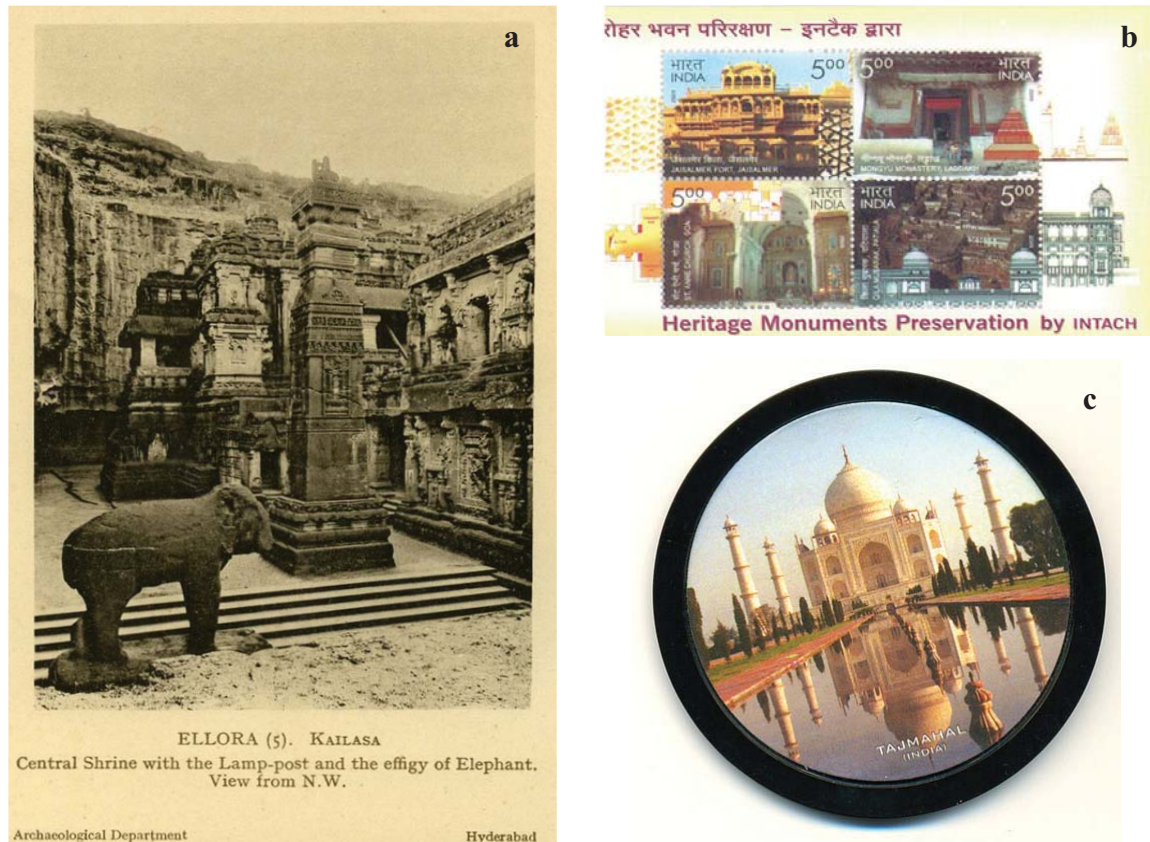
Figure 8. a). Postcard of Kailash Temple (Ellora) Archaeological Department, Hyderabad State, ca. 1930s; **b).** Postage stamps issued by INTACH (The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage), ca. 2000; **c).** Fridge magnet with Taj Mahal (Agra), ca. 2010.

tion… [that reinforced] the taxonomic readings of the images, creating a cohesive object rather than a series of images with their own semiotic energies' (Edwards 2002: 72). Yet despite attempts at regulating 'the semantic traffic in photographs' through acts of archiving (Sekula 1986:55), the two archives also expose rather clearly the futility of imposing original meanings on photographs.

Photographs accrue layers of meanings through their circulation and archiving—meanings that are ascribed during different situations of viewing, and established within different moments of their social biographies. Thus, a photograph represents the slippage between image and its referent. The consumption of the photographs taken during archaeological excavations and conservation, as tourist brochures, postage stamps and souvenirs (figures 8a, 8b, 8c) informs of their performances as social actors, in that they construct and influence discursive fields in ways which would not have been possible had they not existed. In this respect, samples from the

Thomas Whiffen Collection (at MAA) provides a lucid example of the ways in which we use 'identical' images, i.e. those that share a 'parent' in the negative, for securing profoundly different narratives (figures 9a, 9b, 9c).

Whiffen photographed the 'cannibal tribes' of *The North West Amazons*, in 1908–09, within the perimeters of the Peruvian Amazonian Company, a European company notorious for its treatment of the labourers who worked within its rubber estates. However, he systematically erased the context of this encounter through his photography. For example, by inserting the head image of the 'chief's son with a feathered head dress' within his drawing of a dancing Muenane group (Whiffen 1915: plate XIII), he masked the European setting (figure 9a) in which he had taken the photograph of this boy (i.e. figure 9b). The identity of the young boy is ambiguous within the negative where we see him holding a dog, which contradicts Whiffen's contentions that the indigenous people did not domesticate dogs.

Figures 9. a). Positive image of glass negative with paper frame placed by Whiffen to highlight the boy's head; **b).** The negative *sans* frame (N.26839.WHI); **c).** lantern slide (LS.26731.WHI), Thomas Whiffen, Northwest Amazon, South America, ca. 1908–09. MAA.

Neither the boy's parentage, namely, a chief's son, nor his tribal affiliations, whether a Boro, can be affirmed with certainty through Whiffen's vague references of him in his publication (ibid: 76). Yet, the published image, glass plate negative and lantern-slide (figure 9c) affix the boy's 'traditional' status, and alert us of one of the most common and effective ways in which photographic truths are elicited for establishing eyewitness accounts. Whiffen's photography informs us of our expectations from photographs.

7. Conclusion

Eyewitness accounts of archaeological evidence has often entailed observations through analogical prisms, and photography's seminal contribution to archaeology can, perhaps, be best perceived as enabling the analogical nature of archaeological enquiry. Thus, we note that in the book *Origins of a Civilization*, which is widely used for undergraduate teaching, the authors, Raymond Allchin and Bridget Allchin, had declared that:

> If one needs further confirmation of the profound and lasting character of the Indus civilisation, and of its being the antecedent of the later civilisation which sprang up during the Iron Age and early Historic Period, one cannot do better than to visit the modern towns and

villages of Sindh and the Punjab. Standing on the top of the high mound at Sehwan, on a winter's dawn, looking through the smoky haze that hangs over the town, it is not difficult to envisage the centuries slipping back some four and a half millennia and to picture this as a Harappan rather than twentieth-century town (1997: 204–5).

The Allchins appended the above text with a photograph of a view of the modern town of Sehwan, which they had taken during their fieldwork of the area during the 1950s–'70s (ibid: plate 63). The published photograph, which is meant to transmit the reality of the evocation, conveys the force of analogy as logic. Juxtapositions of disparate time frames through uses of photography satiates the ethno-archaeological method, and hence, engaging with photographs for exploring the constructs of archaeological knowledge occasions us to take stock of our historicizing processes (for details Guha 2012b).

In this respect we note that the parentage of the 'viewing' of India echoes the histories of antiquarian practices within South Asia. Following Alexander Cunningham's dictates that 'the study of antiquities received its first impulse from Sir William Jones, who in 1784 founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal' (1871: v), the origins of antiquarian scholarship within the region has been routinely tracked as a distinctive 'western cognitive entity' (to quote Guha-Thakurta 2004: 3). Thus, all new histories of Indian archaeology (e.g. Chakrabarti 1988, Singh 2004, Lahiri 2006, Ray 2008) sustain a historiography that endorses the notion that the natives of Hindustan were beholden to the British for acquiring the intellectual tools for the scientific study of the past. Conceptual contradictions are inevitably bred when primary elements of a much-maligned historiography are simply accommodated as raw data, and considering that the modern histories of Indian archaeology claim at shedding the mantle of colonial historiography, the blatant emulations can only be summarised as being profoundly ironic. The experiential metaphor, which has been drawn by Bohrer for discerning photography's relationship with archaeology may indeed allow us to see the nuances within histories of this relationship. However, as we may convincingly argue through this article, there is much room for negotiations outside the metaphorical semantics, for gauging the force of the tactility of photographs within constructs, histories and shifting notions of archaeological knowledge.

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