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Colonial Visions: Sir Mortimer Wheeler and Archaeological Representations in India (1944–48)

Introduction

This paper critically examines the representation of a 'vision' of a colonial administrator/archaeologist/academician through the texts that Sir Mortimer Wheeler published in particular, and the nature of the visual lexicography that is employed in the disciplinarian discourse of archaeology in general. Focusing on the epistemological homology between the construction of archaeological knowledge, archaeological evidence and the nature of archaeological representation, I scrutinize the nature of visual representations that Wheeler produced.

Theoretical Basis

The formalistic syntax of the visual discourse that Wheeler employed was deeply embedded in the disciplinarian ideologies of the colonial project, the scientific project and the military project (see Cohn 1996; Prakash 1999). The discursive practices of these ideologies were reflected by and imbricated in the archaeological knowledge that Wheeler constructed- its mode of production, its means of representation and its location of consumption. Through this paper, I attempt to explore the relationship of these ideologies embedded in Wheeler's visual representations and their impact on the method, practice and epistemology of the archaeological project and its formation as a scientific discipline in India. I situate my inquiry in the visual archive of the archaeological work that Wheeler produced in India. These constitute the graphic sites where the ideological agendas of the colonial, scientific and the military discourses collapse to invoke a discipline that had a deep impact on the trajectory that South Asian archaeology took, both in India and Pakistan after the partition in 1947.

The collection of visual records of India's past that Wheeler produced, can be read as a site for the performances of power and knowledge in the Foucaultian sense (Foucault 1980), instrumental in the complicated construction of the disciplinary discourse of archaeology. The 'panoptical' technologies of disciplinary control (Foucault 1979) are utilized by colonial mechanisms/institutions, mediated through the scientific method, to produce graphic images of power and domination. These representations are intricately instrumental in the construction of a post-colonial identity of the past. Here, multiple gazes intersect – the colonial and the scientific gazes are conflated by the anthropological and voyeuristic gaze to produce 'scopic regimes' which are visual practices to objectify and control the other (see Fabian 1983; Mitchell 1988; Pratt 1992). A product of the multiple gazes becomes a technique of power and surveillance. Operating in the discursive territory of the scientific project to constitute the 'other', in archaeology, through the application of the apparatus of mechanical reproduction, a cartographic project is set forth to control the colonized space by appropriating Cartesian perspectivalism. This perspective, explains Martin Jay, is the "reigning visual model of modernity' which best articulates 'the 'natural' experience of sight valorised by the scientific worldview" (Jay 1988, 115). Wheeler's visual representations are an explicit example of such a scopic regime, situated in the legacy of the 'exploratory gaze' – an epistemological strategy embedded in the imperial enterprise that transforms the subjugated space into the universal, quantifiable and divisible body that can only be comprehended in a Cartesian universe (Ryan 1996, 4–6). This is a practice that resembles the methods of scientific production of knowledge especially in the earth sciences, where nature is ordered, controlled and transformed into a laboratory, in order to produce adequate knowledge. Here, the undomesticated natural world is bounded in Cartesian co-ordinates to manufacture results useful in the colonial/scientific project (Latour 1999, 24–80). In this paper, I argue that Wheeler's visual representation of India's past becomes a location for the creation of a fractured knowledge through objectification of a colonized landscape embedded in,

Fig. 1. Arikemedu 1945. Wheeler, R. E. M. 1954, Archaeology from the Earth. Baltimore: Penguin Books.

and mediated through, the scopic regimes of modernity. Entrenched in the discursive control of the scientific, anthropological and the voyeuristic gazes, in order to produce visual representations of archaeological knowledge, this vision is not an objective image of the past, but an ideological representation of subjugation.

Photograph of the Discipline

Among Wheeler's most famous images that had a deep impact on the disciplinarian trajectory of archaeology in India was a photograph that he published in his pedagogic text *Archaeology from the Earth* (Wheeler 1954, pl. 4a). Under the caption: "Discipline: excavation at Arikamedu, South India, 1945", (Wheeler 1954, pl. 4b) Wheeler comments: "[this photograph] unblushingly represents an excavation from my own, on the principle that the professor may properly be expected to practice. It shows a site neatly parcelled out into readily controllable areas; small groups of workmen are directed by supervisors (distinguishable in the photographs by their sun-helmets); the basket carriers are working in orderly procession along clear pathways; and in the middle distance in the right, the survey-party is conveniently at work at a table shaded by an essential umbrella" (Wheeler 1954, 80). This photograph (fig. 1) has a canonical aura about it; in this gaze, the disciplinarian project of Wheeler dissolves into the colonial authority. The means of knowledge production, with its emphasis on epistemic certainty, is brought about by taming and controlling the un-orderly within the sites of knowledge production, as well as the knowledge producer. It is not only the field that is transformed into a location of knowledge production tamed by cellular grids, but also the undisciplined colonized workers. They are beyond the control of the incapable colonial master and are the graphic cause of the chaos of the earlier photograph. Their bodies need to be tempered and disciplined by the strict masters who direct the colonized bodies under the comfort of the shade. Thus this photograph transforms into a document that merges the scientific, the colonial and the military discourses in one instance, and in the process, explicitly exposes the "epistemic murk" (Taussig 1987, 1) of the discipline. In the attempts to increase the efficacy of the data gathering process through epistemic control, is inherent the colonial project of civilizing the native.

For Wheeler, the archaeological project suffered from lethargy: a malaise that could only be cured by making it a more professional mechanism of knowledge production, akin to the scientific enterprise. This is evident in his concern with "methodical digging for systematic information, not with the upturning of earth in a hunt for the bones of saints and giants or the armoury of heroes, or just plainly for treasure" (Wheeler 1954, 20). The genealogy of these concepts can be traced to Pitt Rivers (Wheeler 1954, 13). Pitt Rivers developed strategies for comprehensive excavations which stressed the importance of digging uniform and symmetrical trenches, divided by balks for maintaining stratigraphy and recording the finds three dimensionally according to their stratigraphical contexts (Trigger 1989, 199; Lucas 2001, 39).

Wheeler began shaping the rudiments of these ideas soon after the First World War, when he commenced work on the Roman and Iron Age sites in Essex and Wales (Lucas 2001, 37). He was driven by the need for gathering more data because the "knowledge of human achievement outside the

historical field was dependent upon fresh and methodological discovery, and that fresh discovery in great measure meant fresh digging" (Wheeler 1956, 66). At the excavation of the prehistoric fortification of Maiden Castle in Dorset between 1934–37, Wheeler, for the first time utilized the technique of area excavation in regularized trenches with baulks, along with the practice of meticulous mapping and recording of all significant features (Lucas 2001, 39). He used stratigraphy, a concept introduced into the archaeological domain from geology, widely in his excavations (Wheeler 1947b, 143). This was a technique that was introduced by Pitt-Rivers as an important means of retrieving accurate and comprehensive scientific knowledge from an excavation, driven by the fundamental search for chronology in the discipline of archaeology and the necessity for establishing the sequence of ancient cultures (Lucas 2001, 34; Trigger 1989, 199; Wheeler 1959, 55). Wheeler was an able inheritor of Pitt-Rivers' principles, not only because of the shared military background, but also because of the insistence on discipline, rigor and professionalism that both infused into archaeology. These ideas were reflected in Wheeler's professional need for an accurate recording of the archaeological sequences, the finds and the structures in accordance with their stratigraphical indexes, in order to make the knowledge production process a scrupulous exercise.

The methodology of transforming ancient sites into locations for the production of scientific knowledge gained popular currency as the 'Wheeler method', and was made into a concrete practice in the trenches of India, and even today, these methods are taught to students in the field schools. Wheeler's most important contribution to this technique was dividing the archaeological site in grids and inscribing it with Cartesian co-ordinates in the form of baulks. This divided the earlier chaotic location of knowledge production into a scientific laboratory between archaeological baulks, whereby the generated information could be confined, controlled and codified. In this archaeological laboratory, facts about pasts could be accurately documented and scientifically retrieved by keeping a detailed three-dimensional record of the finds. The carved out laboratory space in the earth, with the baulks provided stratigraphical indices whereby evidence about the retrieved past could be further systematized according to Cartesian co-ordinates. The military metaphor played an important role in this method as, here the archaeologist as a professional solider, apprehends the archaeological site as a war zone, in which his superiority has to be displayed and his domination exhibited. In the first among a series of Staff Memoranda that Wheeler wrote as the Director-General of the ASI, he explained the principles of his method in the following way: "the excavation of a site, like the ordering of the battle, must be thought and co-ordinated by a single present and directing mind. Otherwise chaos, waste, inefficiency is inevitable"[1].

Epistemic Marker

The nature of Wheeler's representational strategies was apparent from his prolific publications. He infused his texts with detailed photographic imagery and illustrations which were designed to impart onto the reader the nature of the site, its history and chronology, and also provided a penetrating gaze into the mammoth task that he undertook. Using an image syntax articulated through photographs and illustrations, Wheeler correlated the scientific nature of the archaeological project with the project of inscribing a discourse of knowledge representation on the discipline.

Like most archaeologists of his time, the photographic record formed an essential part of Wheeler's representational oeuvre, and played a central role in the discursive practice of his numerous published texts[2]. Wheeler transformed photographs as epistemic documents that had the ability to provide empirical knowledge about the past, which was constructed as science. This was done by the introduction of an epistemic marker-the scale: "Every archaeological photograph should include a scale, either in the form of a graduated rule or rod or in that of a human figure. (Adult human skeletons provide their own scale with as much accuracy as may be expected from a photograph.)" (Wheeler 1954, 201). The use of the scale as an epistemic marker in archaeological photographs is a common means of transforming an arbitrary sign of the past into scientific knowledge that inscribes an epistemic certainty, which cannot be challenged. This is exacerbated in archaeological excavation, as it is a destructive means of knowledge production that can never be challenged or tested at that particular trench or location. In this process, the photographic document with an epistemic marker transforms the moment of discovery into empirical evidence and inscribes on it a concreteness, which may not be questioned (fig. 2). Thus, the scale becomes the most important signifier of an archaeological photograph and Wheeler underscores its importance: "The scale should normally be parallel with the plane of the camera-plate; if the latter is tilted the graduated scale should be correspondingly tilted, otherwise

[1] AACD (ASI Archive Collection, New Delhi), File No. 33/24/44; 1944. From page 3 of 'Message from Dr. R. E. Mortimer Wheeler, Director General of Archaeology to the staff of the Archaeological Survey of India'. Simila, May 1944.

[2] Wheeler 1946b; 1947b; 1947–48b; 1950; 1962a; 1962b; 1966; 1968; 1976.

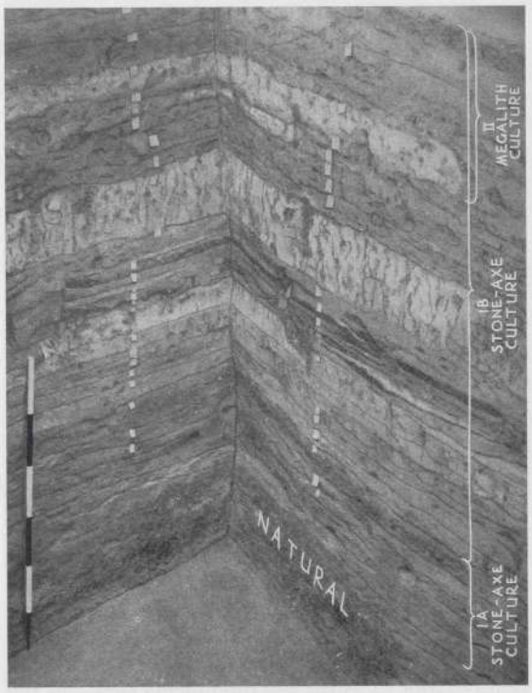

Fig. 2. Brahmagiri 1947. Wheeler, R. E. M. 1947–1948b; Brahmagiri/Chandravalli 1947, Megalithic and other Cultures in Mysore State. In: Ancient India 4, 180–310.

Fig. 3. Harappa 1946. Wheeler, R. E. M. 1947b, Harappa 1946: the Defenses and Cemetery R 37. In: Ancient India 3, 58–130.

the graduations are in perspective and of variable length" (Wheeler 1954, 201). The centrality of the scale and its importance in the transformation of an arbitrary subject is so overwhelming that Wheeler is forced to add a note of caution: "On the other hand, the scale should not monopolize the attention of the spectator. A central scale, is for this reason usually bad" (Wheeler 1954, 202).

Wheeler continued an earlier practice and actively utilized human figures as scales in order to produce an epistemologically sound representation of the past and to legitimise his practice (figs. 3–4). However, Wheeler does ponder over the nature of such an epistemic maker in some detail: "Where the scale is a human being, as is often desirable in large subjects, the individual thus honoured must remember that he is a mere accessory, just so many feet of bone and muscle" (Wheeler 1954, 202). The human figure is thus transformed by Wheeler from a producer of knowledge- an active member of the means of knowledge production- to a passive accessory of the knowledge production project because "(1) the figure shall not occupy a disproportionately large portion of the picture and (2) that the figure shall not look at the camera but shall ostensibly be employed in as impersonal a manner as possible" (Wheeler 1954, 202). It is not coincidental that Wheeler never appears as the human epistemic marker in any of the images that were produced during his excavations in India. Invariably it is the non-descript workman/woman, the subaltern, who plays the dual role of the human epistemic marker and the ethnic marker – an anthropological motif crucial to the visual representation of colonial archaeological projects. The tradition of utilizing the subaltern human marker was widely practised in Indian archaeology before Wheeler, but he provides the marker with an epistemological meaning, which also had scientific credence. The subalterns in the colonial archaeological projects were daily wage earners, unskilled labourers, usually recruited from villages adjoining the excavated site who executed the majority of the physical work of digging, removing and cleaning the excavated area.

The subaltern labourers, both men and women, were objectified in the representational lexicon of archaeological knowledge by Wheeler, and utilized as an ethnic marker to legitimise the colonial undertaking of inscribing on the subalterns, their past. This past is discovered by colonial authority, but unknown to the subalterns. They are incapable of discovering it themselves- it is only through the participation in the colonial project that they can engage with it. The encounter with their glorious heritage, the experience with their ancient ancestors is only possible through an intermediary- the colonial knowledge-producing agency – Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). The subaltern subjects were subverted because, in spite of being given a place of pride in the knowledge production process, they were simultaneously appropriated to

authenticate the Enlightenment project of civilizing the native. They are always shown in these photographs as the industrious workmen or women, attired in native robes and clothes, who experience the past provided to them and are deeply engaged with it while doing menial labour-cleaning. This representation of the natives by fixing them with work that they did, in their traditional attire, along with their tools of trade, was a marker of typicality that signified their ethnicity (Pinney 1997, 53).

Wheeler's visual vocabulary borrowed these tropes from the depiction of native workers in the service of the Raj, where they performed the role not of a primitive symbol but rather of a tame and adaptive labour force (Pinney 1997, 57). The representation of the prototypical natives with occupational gear and clothing, participating in the colonial task, had wide currency, as these images were mass-produced in the form of phototype postcards. The native bodies were thus not only objectified in Wheeler's images, but these representations played the dual role of inscribing the colonial discourse with the legitimacy that it lacked and, also of being simultaneously inscribed by the same project. In the process, the subaltern workmen/women were reduced to motifs in a photographic document and were nothing but a necessary nuisance that had to be controlled and disciplined for the efficacy of the archaeological project: "I have seen, towards the end of the day, the lines of young native basket-carriers, upon whose speed and regularity depends in great measure the general *tempo* of an Eastern excavation, falter and chatter and play truant in spite of the despairing efforts of the strong-minded foreman. Basket carriers are never the most responsible members of the party, and they are necessarily numerous and elusive" (Wheeler 1954, 175–6). Wheeler undermined the identity of the subaltern men and women by objectifying them as an auxiliary item to the scientific discourse. Subaltern subjects were simultaneously disciplined not just by the appropriation of their bodies as the primary means to carry out the knowledge production process, but by the utilization of their bodies as symbols to humanize the representation of knowledge and make it an authentic and legitimate discourse.

The juxtaposition of the human body and the measuring scale in archaeology produces a scientific representation of the past, which has a colonial genealogy. It can be traced to the practice of the colonial anthropometric project of measuring the cranial features of the human subject as means of objectifying it as a scientific fact (see Tanner 1981; Sekula 1989; Hamilton/Hargreaves 2001). The racial process of codifying and disciplining the body of the primitive native is evidenced in photographs taken in the late 19th century in the India, where the primitive native was represented as the *object*

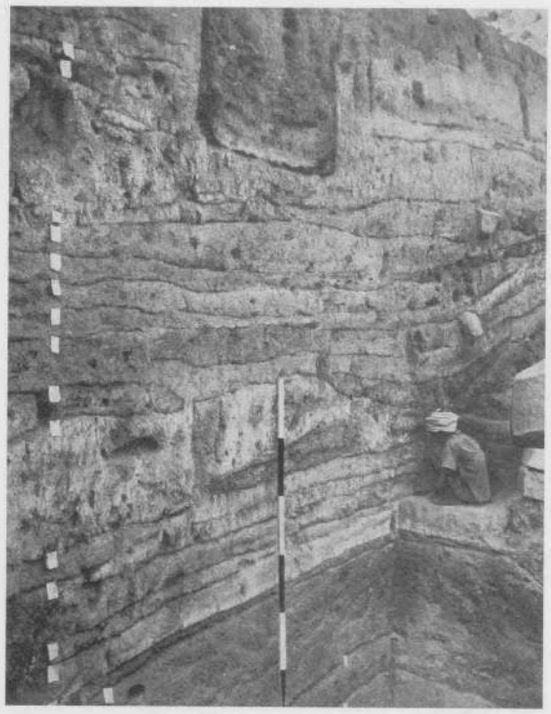

Fig. 4. Brahmagiri 1947. Wheeler, R. E. M. 1947–1948b; Brahmagiri/Chandravalli 1947, Megalithic and other Cultures in Mysore State. In: Ancient India 4, 180–310.

of scientific discourse (see Ryan 1997; Pinney 1992; 1997). The photograph became a performative space, akin to the museum for colonial science, to stage its articulation of power through which the scientific gaze compared, identified, differentiated and categorized the native subject.

Innate in Wheeler's practice of using the native and the scale, was the subtext of disciplining the native and using him as an epistemic marker in order to validate his own position as the colonial master capable of controlling the native through the discourse of science that was already prevalent in colonial India. The measuring scale as a pseudo-scientific device was substituted as a studio prop by the girded backdrop of graph paper in these photographs of the native (Pinney 1997, 51). A reflection of such a grid occurs in the excavation methods of Wheeler, which was marked by the characteristic cellular trenches that were inscribed on the earth to gain more control of the process of generating scientific knowledge (Wheeler 1946a, pl. IIb).

Ethnic Marker

In his work in India, Wheeler produced numerous illustrations depicting stratigraphy, which represented "the successive phases in the archaeological 'history' of a site" (Wheeler 1954, 59). They were prepared by differentiating strata on the basis of "variation in colours or material and content"

which usually "particularly under the bleaching influences of an African or Asian sun, present difficulty to an experienced eye" (Wheeler 1954, 60). Of these, I focus only on a particular type that was produced as overwhelmingly large folding plans, which at a glance gave the stratigraphical chronology of the excavation (Wheeler 1947a, 66; 1962a, 22; 1968, 31, 44). These diagrams were neatly illustrated with clearly demarcated strata and layers and they transformed the "observation in different lights and different times of the day' into illustrations of scientific knowledge. These diagrammatic constructions were attempts to 'read the sections – to discriminate without prejudice, between the more significant and less significant differentiation of the strata" (Wheeler 1954, 60). Thus, after the first step in the 'Wheeler Method' had been transcribed over the mound, with cellular grids as adequate techniques of scientific knowledge production, the second step was initiated through stratification. Cultural layers were identified, codified and also utilized to "interpret them, to understand the sentence and transliterate it" (Wheeler 1954, 60) in order to sufficiently inscribe the dug earth with a chronology. This knowledge was given a firm and fixed shape in two dimensional illustrations, embellished with Wheeler's motif of the subaltern workers, once again represented as the disciplined, industrious and proud native playing the dual role of the epistemic and the ethnic marker. They usually occupy the fringe of the dramatic display, reduced to diminutive figures in the vast stratigraphical performance put together by the colonial masters. Awed by the past inscribed upon them, they are finally controlled and reduced to symbols in a diagram like the other symbols in depicting stratigraphical sections: "for the easy and conventional representations" as "they have no special merit but reasonably expressive" (Wheeler 1954, 77). The dead, non-human stratigraphical illustration is given life: 'an intelligently drawn section is far more than a diagram; it is, as I say, a picture, representing not merely the skeleton but also something of the vital flesh and blood of its subject' (Wheeler 1954, 76).

In these illustrations of stratigraphy, Wheeler is appropriating key Enlightenment aesthetic notions of the picturesque and the sublime that dominated most of the earlier representation of Indian art and architecture throughout the 18th and 19th century. Colonial artists and administrators, overwhelmed by the natural surroundings and the architectural richness of the country, created romantic images of India which had a lasting influence on the way Indian art, architecture and antiquities were represented to the European world (see Mitter 1977; Dirks 1994). The aesthetics of these images were dominated by 18th century European tastes and ideas, shaped by romantic sensibilities (see Drew 1987; Labbe 1998) and erotica, which viewed the image of native people as collectible objects (Dennis 1994, 23). The emergence of these ideas were linked to the discoveries of ancient monuments in Greece and the European Middle ages and led to a revivalist fervour in art and aesthetics which was affected by the notion of picturesque and sublime (Mitter 1977, 120). Picturesque has been deigned as the 19th century's modality of viewing the universe that was situated in the period of transition from classical formalism to a state of romantic disorder which challenged the Renaissance ideas of beauty and aesthetics (see Bermingham 1987; Malcolm 1989; Labbe 1998). It is an artificially and socially constructed mode of viewing landscape, where nature is objectified and transformed into the basis of scientific and aesthetic appropriation (Ryan 1996, 59). On the other hand, the idea of the sublime was linked to a growing interest in nature, evoking a sensation of pleasure in the beholder due to the inability of the human mind to comprehend it (see Twitchell 1983; Labbe 1998). This, in turn, was aroused by the monumental size of the subject (Mitter 1977, 121). In India, this notion is closely connected to early antiquarian ideas of colonial officials, administrators and travellers who first encountered the traditional monuments, architecture and edifices. These were illustrated with a typical romantic treatment, exploiting the idea of the picturesque and the sublime to create images of famous monuments for consumption by a European audience. These earliest depictions of archaeological sites of India in the West presented the monumentality of the site in a dramatic fashion which was brought about by situating the performance of the monument in a vast space, contrasting it with the image of the native, attired in a native costume, diminutively performing his role as the ethnic marker (Mitter 1977; Dirks 1994).

In Wheeler's diagrammatic representation of the stratigraphy in India in the form of folding plans, especially of the huge Indus valley sites of Harappa (Wheeler 1947a, 66; 1968, 31), Mohenjodaro (Wheeler 1968, 44), and the early historic site Charsada (Wheeler 1966, 22), he uses a similar visual rhetoric to magnify the monumentality of the site. He contrasts these representations with the diminutive figures of the subaltern workers in native costumes as they are forced to stand at the corner of these folding large plans, in the symbolic role of the ethnic marker (figs. 5–6). The subtext implied in these representations, very much like the photographs discussed earlier, is that of double inscription. The inscription of the past on native bodies that they are unaware of and therefore in need to be civilized into its knowledge, and the inscription of the archaeological project by these same bodies to authenticate and legitimise the patronizing, civilizing project of the colonial archaeologist. The ethnic markers are the subaltern workmen/women, the labourers with the basket or picks forced on them, appreciating the workman-

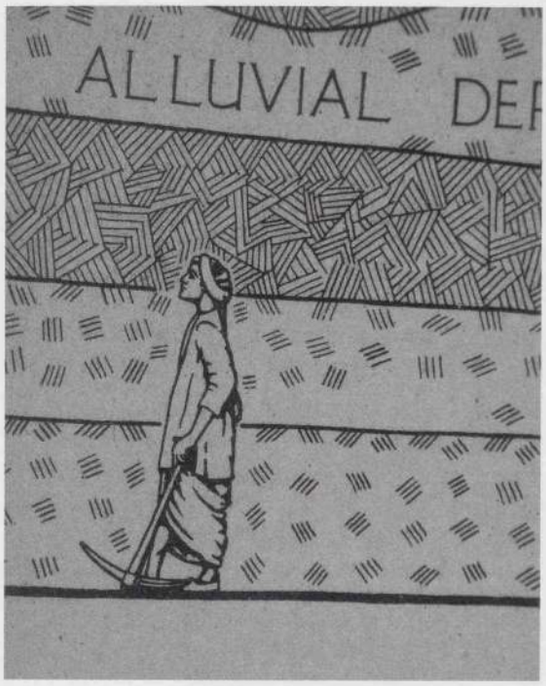

Fig. 5. Harappa 1946. Wheeler, R. E. M. 1947b, Harappa 1946: the Defenses and Cemetery R 37. In: Ancient India 3, 58–130.

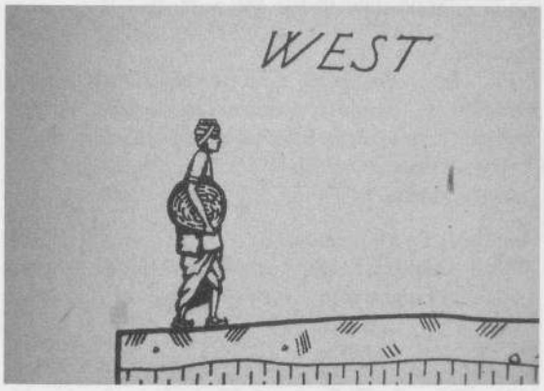

Fig. 6. Harappa 1946. Wheeler, R. E. M. 1947b, Harappa 1946: the Defenses and Cemetery R 37. In: Ancient India 3, 58–130.

ship that they have created for their master and for themselves. About these subalterns, Wheeler notes: "A word of warning: a lazy workman will always try to exchange his large pick for one of these small ones, so that he may squat and peck idly at the surface with a minimum of effort" (Wheeler 1947–1948b, 319).

Conclusions

The impact of Wheeler's visual lexicon has been far reaching in the postcolonial archaeological representation of India's past, in its continued practice till today. In the photographic documentation of ASI's numerous excavations, the epistemic marker and the ethnic marker are nearly ubiquitous. They possess similar characteristics as discussed above and perform the same roles of double inscription. Here, I am providing a few examples from the post independence period: the first is from the official report of the excavation of Lothal, conducted by ASI, between 1955–62 and published after a delay in 1979 (Rao 1979). The subaltern workers are seen in most of the 127 photographic plates of the report that depict landscapes or architectural structures. The human epistemic markers are shown digging, carrying dirt, pointing stratigraphic layers, standing in deep trenches, posing, squatting and cleaning the dirt, also appearing as an epistemic motif in an illustration of a stratigraphic section (Rao 1979). Another example is from a UNESCO volume on Indian archaeology- reviewing the archaeological discoveries in post independence India, which has images of important sites excavated by the ASI- Antichak, Bhagwanpura, Burzahom, Delhi-Purana Quila, Kalibangan, Lothal, Maski, Mathura and Sringaverapura (Thapar 1985). Most of the photographs of these sites have the subaltern workers playing the role of an epistemic marker. And the latest example is on the cover of the Indian Archaeology Review- the annual publication of the ASI. This photograph along with the examples mentioned above, had epistemic markers working in the midst of vast sites, which were divided into the distinctive Cartesian grid of the Wheeler Method (Bisht/Dorje/Banerji 2000). Thus, the visual vocabulary used by the ASI still expresses the ideological subtext of the colonial mission of inscribing the landscape with its statist power and continues the project of producing the past for the natives. The relationship between the ASI and the subalterns in postcolonial India might not be as ideologically accentuated, but the display is equally condescending as the subalterns have been transformed from the native into the illiterate. The scientific gaze of the postcolonial archaeologists still attempts at objectifying the landscape through the *same* colonial apparatus of knowledge production, steeped in a similar ideological framework employing identical methods of extraction, codification and dissemination of archaeological knowledge. Like most institutions of colonial governance, the change that occurred in the ASI, after the transference of power in 1947 was merely symbolic, devoid of any change in the ideological structure of the system, its reach, and its power to inscribe a scientific and an "objective past" on the people of India.

The human epistemic and ethnic marker is an expression of the 'body politic' in the disciplinarian discourse of archaeology, where the bodies of the subaltern are the sites for the articulation of the nexus of power and knowledge in a Foucaultian sense. The bodies of the native or the illiterate

are dominated and subjugated by an ideological apparatus and transformed into objects of knowledge (Foucault 1979, 26). Here, the ASI as a colonial institution (and Wheeler as part of it) operates as an ideological apparatus exerting its power over the subaltern bodies by appropriating their symbolic valence and attributing them with an epistemological significance. This process subverts the subaltern bodies for the knowledge production objective of the colonial project, and simultaneously legitimises its oppressive power. The body of the subaltern is directly involved in a political field as an epistemological category, where the power relations between the dominant and the oppressed are performed in the knowledge production process. The ASI not only exploits the subaltern bodies as a labour force crucial to the archaeological excavation, but also transforms them into a representational idiom, through which it articulates its power over the knowledge about India's past. The domination of ASI is exercised by investing in the subaltern an epistemological valence that is exploited by manipulating it for validating its power to generate knowledge. The photographic archive of Indian archaeology thus is a discursive system in which the scientific, the colonial, and the archaeological process collapse to produce a narrative of domination, exploitation and legitimisation. Here the political function of the archaeological project coalesces with the epistemological meaning of the colonial project, where through the application of scientific technologies, colonial identities are normalized and domesticated.

Wheeler, along with the ASI, took the colonial project of civilizing the native to its logical conclusion, where the colonial machinery was not only involved in a process of controlling the native bodies, but was involved in colonizing minds. An ideological past with a deeply embedded notion of European chronology was provided to a people, who lacked one, with the help of military and scientific methods. This civilizing ideology was responsible for instigating a process within colonized society, especially in a postcolonial context, to alter its cultural priorities according to the disciplinarian discourse that was dictated by the colonizers.

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