

ART. XX.—*Some Notes on Past and Future Archæological Explorations in India.* By G. BÜHLER, Hon. Member Royal Asiatic Society.

JUST thirty-five years ago, in 1860, the Government of India agreed to institute an Archæological Survey of Upper India, and thus to take an active part in the exploration of the numerous and extensive historical remains of the country, which task until then had been left to the desultory efforts (occasionally aided by grants from the public funds) of the learned societies and private individuals. Adverse circumstances, however, very soon counteracted the effects of this official recognition of the claims of antiquarian research to continued Government assistance and guidance. Already in 1866 financial pressure induced Lord Lawrence to stop the work which Sir A. Cunningham had barely begun. The Survey was abolished, and there followed a regrettable time of inaction, which lasted until 1870, when, in consequence of urgent representations from various influential quarters, and especially from eminent members of the Royal Asiatic Society, the Secretary of State and the Supreme Government of India consented to return to the principle laid down in 1860. The next result was the re-opening of the Archæological Survey for the Northern half of India, which was now organized on a larger scale, and the issue of orders by the Secretary of State for the registration and preservation of the historical monuments all over India. Soon afterwards, in 1873, the Government of Bombay was permitted to establish a survey of its own for the Western Presidency, and somewhat later the Government of Madras likewise directed its attention to the

collection of notes regarding the antiquities of Southern India and to their scientific exploration. The movement, begun in 1870, continued in full force for nearly twenty years, and extended during this period even to the more advanced Native States. The Mahārājas of Mysore, Baroda, Bhaunagar; Jepur and Udepur in Rajputana, and others, either availed themselves of the services of the Archæological Surveyors or established small departments of their own, among which the Jepur and Mysore Surveys especially have furnished most valuable contributions. But in 1889, with the abolition of the post of the Director-General of the Survey, a reaction began, which since has become more and more perceptible. The number of the Provincial Surveyors who at first were allowed to continue their work has been reduced almost every year, and the few men still kept on are engaged merely for short terms, some of which are now close on their expiration. These facts look as if the statements, now and then appearing in the newspapers, were not without foundation according to which Government intends, or at least is not disinclined, to sever its connection with antiquarian research in a few years, and perhaps to entirely withdraw its aid.

Even the possibility of such a prospect naturally causes deep concern and regret to all those engaged or interested in Indian research, as the stoppage of Government assistance would most seriously impede, perhaps make impossible, the further reconstruction of the political, religious, and literary history of India, which undoubtedly possesses a great and general interest, not only for the Hindus but for the whole civilized world. The possibility of such a prospect makes it also incumbent on all Orientalists and friends of India to raise their voice and once more to urge on the Indian Government the necessity for the continuation of the enlightened policy adopted in 1870, in spite of the no doubt considerable financial difficulties of the present day. Already the late Congress of Geneva has spoken on the subject, and has passed a resolution addressing a petition to Her Majesty's Secretary of State for India and to the

Viceroy in favour of the preservation of the Aśoka inscriptions, and of the preparation of impressions to be deposited in the Imperial Museum at Calcutta. Something more is, however, required, and with the hope that the Royal Asiatic Society, which is most nearly concerned with the question, and whose action will, no doubt, possess the greatest influence, may be induced to move in the matter, I venture to offer, at the request of a distinguished member of its Council, the subjoined notes on past and present archæological explorations, intended to show the necessity of the continuation of the work and to indicate the direction in which it ought to be carried on.

The operations falling within the province of the Archæological Survey may be classed under three main heads—(1) the registration of the visible architectural and epigraphic monuments, as well as the description and the identification of the ancient ruins; (2) the preparation of exact reproductions of the visible monuments and their publication, with the necessary explanations, viz. scientific discussions of the sculptures and architectural details, as well as transcripts and translations of the inscriptions; and (3) excavations of the more promising and historically important fields of ruins.

Work of all these three classes has been undertaken by the officers of the Archæological Survey, with the assistance of a large number of outsiders, but the amount of attention which each has received and the results actually achieved vary very considerably. With the description of the old sites and the registration of the visible monuments, which naturally must precede the other operations and at the same time presented least difficulties, by far the greatest progress has been made.

The several Series of Survey Reports and Papers contain an enormous mass of information regarding the location of many thousands of architectural monuments, sculptures, and inscriptions, scattered over nearly the whole of India, and, though additions no doubt would be possible for most districts, they yet give the archæologist a very good general

idea where the chief fields for his labours lie. There is only one larger tract, Western Rajputana, which has not yet received its due share of attention. It is also highly desirable that the notes should be arranged for all the Presidencies and minor territorial divisions as systematically and intelligibly as has been done by Mr. Sewell for Madras,<sup>1</sup> and by Dr. Führer for the N.W. Provinces.<sup>2</sup>

With respect to the operations falling under the second head, the preparation of drawings and photographs of architectural monuments and sculptures, and of impressions of inscriptions, as well as their publication, it is only possible to say that a very fair beginning has been made. Something appreciable has no doubt been done, but much more remains to be accomplished.

As regards Indian art, Sir A. Cunningham's volumes on Bharahut and Gayā, Major Cole's photographs, and Colonel Maisey's work on Sanchi give, together with Dr. Fergusson's older publication, a good general idea of its state during the Maurya and Śunga periods. But it is a matter of regret that the sculptures of the Sanchi and Bharahut Stupas have not been published all and throughout on such a scale as to be of service to the student of archæology. The art of the Andhra period has been illustrated very fully by Dr. Burgess in several volumes of his Arch. Survey Reports, and has been treated systematically by the same scholar and Dr. Fergusson in the "Cave Temples of India." To Dr. Burgess' Reports we owe also our knowledge of the development of Indian art during the rule of the Chalukyas and Rāshtrakūṭas over the northern Dekhan, and of the Chaulukyas and Jethvās over Gujarat and Kathiawar. Further publications referring to Southern India, and based on Dr. Burgess' own and others' ample collections of photographs and drawings (mostly in the India Office),

<sup>1</sup> Lists of Antiquities of Madras.

<sup>2</sup> Architectural Monuments and Inscriptions of the North-West Provinces. I am glad to see that Dr. Führer's Progress Report for 1893-94, which reached me after the above notes were written, speaks of the preparation of such a compilation for the Panjab.

are in course of preparation. Mr. Griggs' plucky resolution to publish autotypes of the Ajanta Paintings will satisfy another want, long felt by all archæologists.

As regards Upper and Central India, many notices and illustrations of monuments from the times of the Indo-Scythians, the Guptas, the Pālas, Chandellas, Kalachuris, and other dynasties, as well as important discussions on various styles of architecture, are scattered in Sir A. Cunningham's Survey Reports. But not a single period has been treated exhaustively, or with such details as to give a perfectly clear idea of all its characteristics. The Survey Reports are a perfect mine of information and of most valuable suggestions, but difficult to use for any but those few students who possess other extensive collections of materials. The real work, I fear, has still to be done for the districts to which the Survey Reports refer, and it is a task of very considerable magnitude, which will require years, not only of office work but of new researches in the ancient sites—even if merely the most important periods and styles are taken up. To the most pressing wants belong systematically arranged comprehensive works on all the known so-called Indo-Grecian sculptures, of which Major Cole's photographs only give a portion, and on the native Indian art of the Indo-Scythian and Gupta periods.

With respect to Epigraphy, for which, owing to the insufficiency of the earlier facsimiles and estampages, a new beginning had to be made, matters stand, no doubt, even better. But much, very much, has still to be done before the accessible monuments can all be published in critical editions. Thanks to the efforts of Drs. Burgess, Fleet, Führer, and Hultzsch, trustworthy impressions of all the inscriptions of the Maurya period have been prepared, and very good facsimiles of most of them have appeared in the *Epigraphia Indica* and the *Indian Antiquary*. The only desiderata for this period are complete photolithographs of the Shahbazgarhi and Mansehra Rock Edicts, of the Bairat Edict to the Sāmgha, the otherwise excellent autotype of

which, published by M. Senart in the *Journal Asiatique*, is on too small a scale, and of the newly discovered Nigliva Pillar Edicts, as well as perhaps some more specimens of the 450 small votive inscriptions from the Sanchi Stupas. Among the few inscriptions of the next two centuries the large Hathigumphā inscription of Khāravela requires a good impression and facsimile. As regards the Śaka and Kushana periods, the inscriptions in Kharoshthī must nearly all be re-edited with facsimiles, and the series of those in Brāhma characters has to be completed. The partly contemporaneous and partly somewhat later documents of the Western Kshatrapas, the Andhras, and the Abhīras require, with the exception of a few inscriptions from Kathiawar and a certain number from Kanheri, nothing further than what has been done for them by Dr. Burgess in his *Survey Reports of Western India*. The epigraphic remains of the dynasties ruling in Western India and the Northern Dekhan during the fifth and later centuries, have been published in great abundance in the *Indian Antiquary*, the *Western India Reports*, the *Epigraphia Indica*, and in the *Journal Bom. Br. Roy. As. Soc.*<sup>1</sup> The inscriptions from Southern India are well represented in the volume of the *Southern India Reports*, the *Indian Antiquary*, the *Epigraphia Indica*, and Dr. Hultsch's two volumes of South-Indian inscriptions. But in spite of the great progress made, especially since Dr. Hultsch's appointment as epigraphist, there is work for many years, as the number of the known, but untouched, inscriptions in the Madras Presidency amounts to many thousands.

Among the inscriptions of the dynasties which held Central and Upper India after the Indo-Scythic period, those of the Guptas alone have been edited fully and on scientific principles—by Dr. Fleet in vol. iii of the *Corpus Inscr. Indicarum*. For the documents belonging to all the other

<sup>1</sup> Additional unpublished documents are, however, in existence, especially in the collections of the late Dr. Bhagvānlāl, who, in the *Bombay Gazetteer*, mentions, or gives extracts from, various Silāhāra and Sendraka inscriptions in his possession.

numerous races a great deal remains to be done. Though the *Indian Antiquary*, the *Epigraphia Indica*, and the later volumes of the Journ. As. Soc. of Bengal contain, perhaps, a hundred or more inscriptions of the later rulers of Kanauj, of the Pālas, Senas, the kings of Nepal, the Kalachuris, Chandellas, and Paramāras, and of other less notable families, in good editions and with good reproductions, there are several hundreds noticed or given in insufficient facsimiles in the Archæological Survey Reports of India. A number of tours will have to be undertaken in order to collect the fresh materials, and the work will take years.

As regards the operations falling under the third head, the excavations, it is impossible to deny that little has been done beyond what might be called "prospecting." A very considerable number of Stupas have no doubt been opened, rifled of their deposits, and searched for inscriptions. Surface diggings and small clearings have also been made and archæological wells have been sunk, as Sir A. Cunningham's Reports show, in many of the ancient mounds and fields of ruins. But really scientific excavations, as understood at present, which lay bare the whole of the monuments or sites to be explored, have been attempted only in very few places, as at Sanchi, Gayā, Bharahut, Amarāvati, Jaggayyapeta, and quite recently at Bhaṭṭiprolu, and in the Kankali Tila at Mathurā. In all these cases only single monuments or small groups have been attacked, which, with a single exception, are not situated in the ancient centres of civilization, but either in isolated positions or in towns, which have sprung up and become famous as places of pilgrimage in consequence of the existence of the monuments. And all the monuments excavated belong (again with one exception) solely to the Buddhists, who were, as recent researches have shown more and more clearly, by no means the oldest nor the only important sect of ancient India.

The reasons which have induced the Indian archæologists to pay less attention to excavations than to the other branches of their work, are clear enough and perfectly

sufficient. It was, no doubt, their first duty to ascertain and register the localities where the historical remains are found, and to make known the monuments still visible on the surface. And the costliness of extensive excavations made it advisable either merely "to prospect" or to attempt a full exploration only in such places where success was an absolute certainty.

The results, which even these restricted operations have yielded, undeniably possess a very high value. They have extended our knowledge of Indian art very considerably. They have brought to light many hundreds of epigraphic documents, some of which, like those on the Jaina sculptures at Mathurā, are of the first importance for the political and religious history of India, while others, like the inscriptions on the Bhāṭṭiprolu relic caskets, and the masons' alphabet at Gayā, are invaluable for palæography. They have even thrown a new light on a portion of the ancient Buddhist literature, as the inscribed medallions at Bharahut permit us now to ascribe with confidence a high antiquity to the important Jātaka texts. This undeniable and great success is certainly a strong argument in favour of further excavations. But I believe that a still stronger case may be made out for their continuation on a definite plan, framed in accordance with the experiences gained, and with the most pressing wants of Indian historical research.

A real progress with the reconstruction of Indian history can only be made if new authentic documents are obtained, such as are older than Aśoka's, as well as such as will fill up the great gaps which occur in the second and first centuries B.C. and in the third and fourth centuries A.D. And such will be only found underground, and partly only at a considerable depth. The expectation that inscriptions of the times of the first two Mauryas, and of the dynasties which preceded them in the fourth and fifth centuries, may and will turn up, is, I think, by no means unfounded. Both the literary and the palæographic evidence shows that the art of writing was known and extensively practised in India for several centuries before Aśoka's times, and

there are even some inscribed coins, which cannot be later than the fourth century. To these belong certainly the Persian Sigloi, with countermarks in Kharoshthī and Brāhmī, discovered by Mr. Rapson, and very probably some of the native Indian coins found by Sir A. Cunningham at Taxila, Eran, and in other ancient sites. Moreover, the probability that writing was used, not only for marking coins but for longer inscriptions, becomes very strong, through certain stories contained in the Buddhist canon. The Jātakas tell us that kings inscribed "the laws of the Kurus," the maxims of good government, and verses of their own composition on gold plates, and that even merchants perpetuated the record of their family history in the same manner; and the Mahāvagga speaks of a proclaimed thief, whose name was put up in the royal palace. Such statements certainly point to the conclusion that the times when they were written were not destitute of epigraphic documents, and the works in which they occur appear to be older than the third century. With respect to the other two periods mentioned, which fall after Aśoka's times, there can be no doubt that they were rich in epigraphic documents, and that remnants will turn up if they are looked for in the right places. At present we possess barely a dozen inscriptions from the second and first centuries B.C., and the period from 200–350 A.D. is for Upper India almost a blank.

The answer to the question where our desiderata may be expected to turn up and should be looked for, can only be that the search for them must be instituted in those fields of ruins which the Archæological Survey has proved to be the remains of the capitals of the ancient empires, or of great centres of the national life. Such sites are chiefly found in Upper India, where their number is so great that their exploration cannot possibly be undertaken at once, even if the Government of India could be induced to sanction as large an expenditure on archæological work as the sums allotted to the Survey in its palmiest days. If a practical result is to be attained, a selection must be

made, and a few of those places be chosen for thorough excavations where the results are likely to be most important. And I believe that it will be amply sufficient if I point out three, one for each of the great territorial divisions of Upper India, and briefly give my opinion about their respective merits.

The most important historical site in the whole of India is, without a question, Patna-Pāṭaliputra, which was the seat of the Government of India in the days of the Nandas and Mauryas (between *ca.* 420–195 B.C.), and probably the capital of an important kingdom even in much later times. It seems most wonderful that the numerous ruins in such a place should have remained unexcavated for so long a time. The reason probably is that the first surveyors believed the ancient buildings to have been swept away by the river. But now both Sir A. Cunningham and Dr. Waddell, the latest authorities on the historical remains of Patna, though differing in details, agree that the ruins of the palaces of the Nandas and of Aśoka, and those of the other buildings described by the Chinese pilgrims, are traceable. Moreover, Dr. Waddell points out a number of workable places, in which ancient sculptures have been found and are still being found. This is sufficient to justify an attempt at thorough excavations, which, if carried on with the necessary care and perseverance, will no doubt place the ancient history of India on a much sounder and more solid basis.<sup>1</sup>

Next in importance would be the continuation of the explorations at Mathurā, and thorough excavations in the ruins of Shah Deri or Taxila. With respect to Mathurā, the important finds of Pandit Bhagvānlāl, the results obtained by Sir A. Cunningham and by Dr. Burgess, and the splendid success of Dr. Führer in 1889–91, which put the history of the Jaina sect into altogether a new light, do not leave the slightest doubt that its numerous untouched

<sup>1</sup> I am glad to see that Dr. Führer's Progress Report for 1893–94, which came into my hands after the above notes were written, holds out the prospect of an excavation of Aśoka's palace during the next season.

or superficially explored mounds will yield a great store of important inscriptions and valuable sculptures. Their persistent and careful exploration will certainly throw light on the dark period between 200–350 A.D., and bring additions to the inscriptions of the second and first centuries B.C. Possibly it may also produce something for the period before Aśoka, as the Greek accounts prove the existence of the worship of Kṛṣṇa in the fourth century B.C. Perhaps a search, instituted in the accessible parts of the Katra Mound, under which lies *inter alia* the old temple of Keśava, may lead to discoveries which are of importance for the history of Vaishnavism.

The selection of Shah Deri or Taxila for operations in the Panjab seems advisable for many reasons. Its ruins, among which Sir A. Cunningham<sup>1</sup> has traced fifty-five Stupas, twenty monasteries, and nine temples, extend over six square miles, and are, according to the same authority, in a better state of preservation than those of any old town in the Panjab. Even with the "prospecting" undertaken hitherto, they have furnished various very important inscriptions, like the Society's famous copper-plate of Patika, as well as numerous highly interesting sculptures, among them, according to Sir A. Cunningham, the only real Greek column ever found in India, and a large number of very valuable coins, some of which are inscribed with legends in the oldest Kharoshthī and Brāhma characters, and probably belong to the end of the fourth century. To these points may be added that, according to numerous passages of the Buddhist canon, Taxila was the greatest university of India during the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., and possibly earlier, to which even the Brahmans and Kshatriyas of Benares and Eastern India flocked in order to study the three Vedas and the eighteen branches of science under world-renowned teachers, and that also the Greek authors bear witness to its wealth and importance. The site of such a city, which besides was for a long time

<sup>1</sup> Arch. Survey Rep., vol. ii, p. 111 ff.

under Greek rule, will, if patiently and carefully explored, in all probability yield results important for the history of various periods.

The circumstances stated furnish, it seems to me, good reasons for making an effort to secure the continuation of the archæological and epigraphic work in India. And if it is decided to make such an effort, the points to which particular prominence ought to be given are, in my opinion—

(1) The maintenance of an Archæological Survey, with at least one duly qualified officer for each of the larger territorial divisions, especially for those of Upper India.

(2) The necessity of employing these Archæological Surveyors both to fill up the gaps left in the work of former years (mentioned above under heads 1-2), and to carry on thorough and scientific excavations, which, in the first instance, should be restricted to the most important site in each province (whether that proposed above or some other found to be more suitable on further consideration), and should be continued until the site is completely cleared.

(3) The continuation of the epigraphic work, particularly in Madras, under a competent Epigraphist, who should also, as under the present arrangements, edit the *Epigraphia Indica*, the future existence of which periodical ought likewise to be assured.

(4) In addition it would be, perhaps, advisable to call attention to the fact that the consultation of experts or of the Asiatic Societies of India and England, with reference to the work of the Archæological Surveyors, would be most beneficial and important for the due progress of their work.

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