1 Anthropology of Archaeology

It was my first day at the archaeological site of Hansi, excavated by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). The excavation director—a middle-aged, burly north Indian man wearing a white bush-shirt and donning dark shades—took me on a site tour. Hansi was a monumental, multilayered site nestled in a medieval fortification adjacent to a bustling town in Haryana's Hissar district. It is known for its thriving agrarian marketplace. We strolled to the site from the campsite located on the cricket grounds of the local intermediate college. Walking slowly, we meandered through the town's congested streets, marketplace, and Dalit slums encroaching the edge of the site, and reached the citadel at the top of the mound. The excavation director, an upper-caste Brahmin from Uttar Pradesh, explained to me, in chaste Hindi, the archaeology of the site and the challenges of excavating a large multilayered site. We walked past a series of deep excavation trenches exposing late medieval Muslim layers and early medieval Rajput layers. Suddenly, during his narration, he paused, removed his dark shades, and peered at me; with pride, spiked with a firm sense of explicatory finality, he declared: "If you don't discover in archaeology, then it is pointless" (*archaeology main discovery nahi ki, toh kya kiya*). "But what about theory?" I asked. The excavation director of Hansi swiftly quipped: "It is you people who do theory. We in the ASI dig" (*Theory-weory aap karthe hain. Hum ASI main khudai karthe hai*). "If we do not produce data, what will you theorist do?" (*Agar hum ne data nahi nikaala toh, aap theorist kaya karenge?*).

The past has played a formidable role in the self-fashioning of the modern Indian nation state. Along with historical narratives, archaeological materiality has significantly contributed to the reimagination of India as a contiguous entity spanning over 5,000 years. The ASI has been the epistemological heart of the production of ancient materiality for more than 150 years. An institution of colonial genealogy, it is now an organization of postcolonial bureaucracy. In the colony, the ASI was an investigative apparatus of a state in search of the ancient at the fringes of the Empire; in the postcolony, the ASI is a custodian bureaucracy protecting the vast monumental heritage of India from disintegration, and a foremost producer of archaeological knowledge. Established by the British colonial state in 1861, it was the foundational statist apparatus for the production

of archaeological data, facts, and information in colonial India in the form of sweeping surveys and excavations. It continued to play a pivotal role in the production of nationalist archaeological narratives after independence in 1947. Scholars have shown that the ASI's claims to factual legitimacy are associated with the disciplinarian discourse of archaeology as a science (see Chakrabarti 1989, 2003; Ramaswamy 2001; Chadha 2002; Guha-Thakurta 2005). Today, the ASI excavates large swaths of ancient sites. It uncovers monumental structures, generates millions of artifacts, and produces a large volume of scholarly literature. Since 1947, it has excavated more than 300 archaeological sites. Although the ASI is primarily a heritage protection and conservation bureaucracy, it gains enormous legitimacy and prestige through the production of authentic knowledge about the past.[1]

The book follows the archaeological material culture discovered in the ASI trenches to its transformation into empirical facts published in official reports. Through a "thick description" (Geertz 1973) of the "archaeological process" (Hodder 1999) in an outlying location of the "postcolony" (Mbembe 2000)—an idiosyncratic site compared to the relative stability of the Euro-American world—I establish the epistemological susceptibility of archaeology's "theory of practice" (Bourdieu 1977). The objective power of ASI archaeology emerges from both its role as an institutional formation of postcolonial bureaucracy and the fissured science of its archaeology. By concentrating on such a fractured location of knowledge production, I examine the epistemological enunciation of the discursive practice of archaeology as a science—signifying its ideological basis. Employing meticulous ethnographic examples, supported by historical data, this book argues that the bureaucratic ecology of the ASI's institutional apparatus is so pervasive that its social culture permeates the epistemic evidence it produces and represents as empirical facts. I anthropologically show that the bureaucratic archaeology of the ASI is an articulation of a colonial ideology performed in the postcolonial ecology that has a debilitating impact on the epistemology of the past in India.

The ASI is as an emblematic organization in this book imbricated in the institutional practices of the postcolonial state. There are many reasons that motivated me to conduct this ethnographic work at the ASI. The ASI is not just one of the oldest archaeological bureaucracies in the world, but also one of the largest of its kind and has enormous control over the archaeological heritage of India. Unlike other parts of the world, Indian laws did not allow private cultural resource management organizations to conduct archaeological excavations in India, thus making the ASI hegemonic compared to underfunded university departments and marginalized state archaeological departments.

Also, ASI bureaucrat-archaeologists are distinct from archaeologists working in a university setting in India because of the significant statist authority they wield. The ASI's dominance in archaeological knowledge production in India has legal validity and objective sanctity because it is part of the statist machinery. By a series of legislations dated to the late nineteenth century, the ASI was given the custodianship of archaeological heritage in India. It is illegal to excavate any site in India without a license issued by the director general (DG) of the ASI. Over the course of a century and half, it has created a huge archive of knowledge about the Indian past, far surpassing any other archaeological organization in South Asia. It also has the jurisdiction over a huge collection of artifacts and material culture, discovered and excavated since its inception. Thus, the ASI has an insurmountable hegemonic authority over the archaeological heritage of India. No other statist or non-statist actors could overrule its influence.[2] In these circumstances, the ASI becomes a potent site to study the intersection of archaeology, science, state, and bureaucracy.

There is indistinguishable ideological commensurability between bureaucracy and science—being archetypally rational, predominantly technocratic, historically modernistic, fetishizing efficacy, and emphasizing objectivity. The epistemic community of ASI archaeology is both scientists and bureaucrats at the same time. It is this aggregation of bureaucratic and scientific knowledge production apparatus that makes it a fertile site to investigate the nature of science and the state. This book, in particular, examines the everyday practices (De Certeau 1984) of the ASI bureaucracy at the archaeological site to focus on the theory of practice (Bourdieu 1977) of regulation, control, and management in micro-settings with an emphasis on investigating the technologies and assemblages of the postcolonial state, along with an interrogation of the operations of materials, agents, and techniques by the ASI to put these bureaucratic rationalities into practice. My aim is to examine the ontology of bureaucratic archaeology in all its specificity rather than providing a general theory of the state or archaeology.

At the ASI, the discursive authority of archaeology's disciplinary assertions do not derive from the scientific method of its practices, as claimed by the processual archaeologists. Nor does it derive from the interpretative nature of its knowledge construction processes, as argued by the post-processual archaeologists. Neither is archaeology a practice susceptible to subversion by political and nationalistic insinuation. Instead, I argue in *Bureaucratic Archaeology* that archaeology is itself an ideological and cultural knowledge production practice. The theoretical and methodological contrariness between construction of evidence and its interpretative creation of knowledge is not incommensurable. These dissimilarities present a retroactive perspective on the process of archaeological knowledge production.

It is the epistemic logic of archaeology and the social and cultural practice of its science that make it vulnerable to statist and nationalist appropriation in the ASI. In the vast, dusty, and desolate fringes of western India, I realized that the ASI's archaeology was a colonial epistemology (ideology) reinforced by science (process) and fortified by postcolonial bureaucracy (apparatus). Empiricism here is compromised three times—first, by an oppressive disciplinary apparatus (colonial archaeology); second, by an ideological discursive methodology of practice (science); and, finally, by an imperiously stratified hierarchy (postcolonial bureaucracy). I show in this book how bureaucracy (ontology) apprehends the discourse of archaeological practice (disciplinary apparatus) to construct a discourse about the Indian past (epistemology), and I argue that this past for the ASI is a bureaucratic *artifice* rather than a scientific *artifact*.

Ethnography of Archaeology as Science

Science in the non-western world has been historically positioned as a deferred trajectory of advances in the west, pushing, for instance, postcolonial science at the periphery of its epistemological deliberations (Chambers and Gillespie 2000). Correspondingly, the discourse of science and technology studies has been dominated by an obsession on "big" science, "real" science, and "techno" science—high-energy physics, biosciences, new media, and other dominant scientific enterprises. These areas provided high visibility and accountability to the sociological and historical workings of science—its contradictions, incongruity, and its epistemic dominance. Non-big sciences and scientific practices in the non-western world have been often relegated to scholarly margins (Collins and Pinch 1979; Collins and Evans 2002). Disciplines such as archaeology have mostly been consigned to the discursive margins of sociological, historical, and philosophical deliberation of science studies (Wylie 2002; Chapman and Wylie 2016). On the other hand, within the history of archaeology, the non-western trajectory of its disciplinary discourse has been relegated to the margins of its Euro-American-centric worldview. Likewise, the anthropological discourse on bureaucracy has primarily given importance to the preponderance of western ideological teleology, overlooking the idiosyncratic afflictions of postcolonial polity and its statist ideology. In this book, I engage with both these marginal forms of modernity—archaeology and the postcolonial bureaucracy—in order to examine the articulation of their ideological and conceptual contraption.[3] This I do by examining the practice of one formation, archaeology, as a marginal science, ensconced within the ideological grasp of another marginal configuration, the postcolonial bureaucracy. The theoretical emphasis of this book is to study both these marginal structures of modernity, intricately

braided in a non-western setting—postcolonial India. *Bureaucratic Archaeology* is an anthropological investigation of a marginal science, articulated by a marginal state, at the margins of its boundaries. Theoretically, my multi-sited ethnographic intervention (Gupta and Ferguson 1997) is envisaged as a post-Kuhnian, Latourian, postcolonial investigation of archaeology as a bureaucratic science in India.

The discursive trajectory of archaeology as an epistemological practice has struggled with its disciplinarian subjectivity in the second half of the twentieth century.[4] The rise of the scientific imagination endowed with powerful cultural, social, and political authority—specifically, after its resurgence in the atomic age—relegated the social sciences to the periphery of the academy, where they were compelled to assert their scientific legitimacy (Barnes 1974). Historically, by the end of the nineteenth century, archaeology viewed itself as a science in terms of the empirical knowledge that it created (see Daniel 1950; Christenson 1989; Trigger 1989; Kehoe 1998; Schnapp 1996). Employing the received wisdom of the geological sciences—the systematic process of excavation and the use of a typological and classificatory analytical framework—culture-history archaeology gained scientific legitimacy (see Dunnell 1978; Lyman, O'Brien, and Dunnell 1997; Lyman and O'Brien 2003).

In the early 1960s, a concerted attempt to refurbish archaeology's objective authority was launched. The earlier variant of culture-history archaeology, considered closer to the subjective practices of historical and cultural approaches, was pugnaciously resuscitated as a positivist science. Predisposed to Carl Hempel's "logical positivism," archaeology, in the form of processual archaeology (Binford 1968, 17), cast off its subjective culture-history model of knowledge construction for a robust analytical emphasis, through the greater deployment of scientific methodologies into archaeological theory and practice. Processual archaeology, inclined as it was by cultural-evolution theories of change, now attempted to reinforce archaeology's objective claims to the past by applying scientific methods, creating data through observation and experimentation. They particularly insisted on the use of the Popperian hypothetico-deductive method in archaeology to make law-like claims about past human behavior. This gave rise to an environmental deterministic view of the past, lacking human agency, and delegitimizing cultural categories, along with overt proclamations of objectivity based on rigorous application of the scientific method.[5] Christened as "New Archaeology," this new turn in archaeology advanced a positivist view of the past. This had a widespread methodological impact throughout the world of archaeology, including India (Fuller and Boivin 2002).[6]

New Archaeology's scientific ascendancy was, however, short-lived. The upsurge of post-structuralism in the 1980s mounted a trenchant critique of positivist approaches in archaeology, indicting its claims to objectivity as deterministic and faulting its narrow theoretical morphology of being incompetent to comprehend the fluidity and flux of past cultural systems.[7] This theoretical onslaught led to acrimonious debates that profoundly exacerbated the predicament of archaeology's disciplinarian subjectivity wrestling alongside the earlier tussle between history and science (Hodder 1984; Shanks 1992; Hodder et al. 1995). The discordant theoretical squabbling was exacerbated by the widely heterogeneous discursive genealogy of archaeology within the Euro-American world. In America it was disciplinarily aligned to anthropology (Willey and Sabloff 1993; Reyman 1992; Kehoe 1998), whereas in Europe it was closely associated with history (Trigger 1989; Hodder 1991).

Furthermore, the tension in the twentieth-century trajectory of archaeology between science and nationalism also brought archaeology to the forefront of the politics of the modern nation state (Arnold 1990, 1992; Kohl, Fawcett, and Philip 1995; Díaz-Andreu and Champoin 1996; Meskell 1998). The appropriation of archaeology in constructing nationalist ideologies by European nations presents a vivid illustration of this deep-seated tension (Trigger 1984, 1989; Jones 1997), which after World War II played a prime role in the making of the newly decolonized nations (Kuklick 1991; El-Haj 2001, 2012; Shepherd 2002). By the early 1990s, archaeology was in the throes of a serious crisis regarding its disciplinary subjectivity. It had to reluctantly come to terms not just with the heterogeneity of theory and practice but also with the regional diversity of the methodological framework that it once considered homogenous. These factors were the subtext of the assertion of the World Archaeological Conference (WAC) in 1986 in solidarity with the anti-apartheid struggle (Ucko 1987). It was the most explicit symptom of the disciplinary discordance in archaeology (Ucko 1995; Shanks and McGuire 1996; Zimmerman 2006). The destruction of the Babri Mosque in 1992 brought into sharp focus the politics of ethics, the science of archaeology, and the state and nationalism not just in India, but also in the world of archaeology at large—faced with the destruction and deterioration of heritage monuments (Lowenthal 1998; Meskell 1998, 2002; Vitelli and Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2006); the commercialization of archaeological practice; the repatriation of antiquities (Mihesuah 2000; Thomas 2000; Bray 2001); the international trade in illegal antiquities (Brodie et al. 2001); the assertion of the rights of indigenous people (Layton 1989; Atalay 2006); and the excessive subversion of archaeology by politics (Gathercole and Lowenthal 1990; Hamilakis 1996; Jones 1997; Lamberg-Karlovsky 1997). These unrelenting concerns along

with the quandaries about disciplinary subjectivity resulted in archaeology's need for reassessing the historical antecedents of its theory and practice—a process that has continued until now, and of which this book is also a part.[8]

Concurrently, during the last two decades of the twentieth century, the various tensions in the disciplinary subjectivity of archaeology were consistently explored and sorted in the meta-theoretical domain (Fleming and Johnson 1990). This fixation was born with excessive theory building in the discipline during the rise of processual archaeology (Binford 1962; Clarke 1968; Binford and Quimby 1972; Schiffer 1976, 1987; Binford 1977) and prospered during the rancorous struggle with post-processual archaeology.[9] The meta-theoretical approach gave rise to the need to write a history of archaeology, concentrating on the discipline as a cultural and political practice. A discourse evolved, attentively linked to the ascendancy of the nation state in Europe and the expansion of colonialism (Trigger 1984; 1989; Robertshaw 1990; Graves-Brown, Jones, and Gamble 1995; Ucko 1995). The excessive need to theorize the praxis of archaeology within larger meta-historical shifts often ignored the historical genealogy of its disciplinary trajectory in the context of the ideological genesis of its methodologies. In India, this was followed by the writing of a subcontinental history of archaeology, locating the evolution of the discipline in the colonial context (Chakrabarti 1988, 1997; Paddayya 1995).[10] These global and local historical projects were undertaking the documentation of the socio-political genealogies of the discipline. Projects encompassed the chronological accounts delineating the trajectory of archaeology in relation to larger meta-narratives of nationalism, colonialism, and imperialism. However, with post-processual approaches, the necessity to examine the micro-practices and micro-processes of archaeological fieldwork emerged. This gave rise to the historical and anthropological interrogation of archaeological methods (Hodder 1999; Lucas 2002, 2012; Chadwick 2003).

Ethnographic methods in archaeological research have been deployed since the days of processual archaeology, in the form of "ethnoarchaeology" (Watson 1979, 2009) grounded in analogical and homological rationality (David 1992). These approaches problematically mapped ethnographic evidence of contemporary societies inhabiting in the vicinity of the archaeological sites onto the past material culture (Wylie 1985). However, the theoretical genealogy of *Bureaucratic Archaeology* is not located in this discursive moment. Beginning with the dominance of post-processual archaeology in the 1990s, ethnography was deployed to study the disciplinary forms rather than the past (for example, Edgeworth 1990, 2003; Castañeda 1996; Handler and Gable 1997; Bartu 2000; El-Haj 2001; Breglia 2006). This was driven by a conscientious attempt to go

beyond the meta-theoretical critique in archaeology in order to explore its own archives and to uncover the historical genealogy of its disciplinarian impulses—to delve at the edge of the trowel as it were—to examine the interpretative basis of its practice (Hodder 1997, 1999, 2000, 2003; Andrews, Barrett, and Lewis 2000; Berggren and Hodder 2003; Chadwick 2003). The focus was to study the genealogy of archaeological field methods rather than create meta-narratives of disciplinary discourse (Fotiadis 1993; Hodder 1999; Andrew, Barrett, and Lewis 2000; Lucas 2002). The feminist critique of archaeological fieldwork attempted to employ ethnographic intervention to provide a critique of archaeological methods (Gero 1985, 1994, 1996; Conkey and Tringham 1996; Politis 2001). Post-processual archaeologists, in their pursuit of self-reflexive knowledge production, introduced the ethnographer as an important actor to understand the impact of archaeological intervention on the local community, and to study the consequence of their own archaeological practices (Hodder 2000; Berggren 2001; Berggren and Hodder 2003). This has given birth to a distinct field of inquiry in archaeological discourse called "archaeological ethnography" (Meskell 2005, 2007; Castañeda and Matthews 2008; Hollowell and Nicholas 2008; Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009; Hollowell and Mortensen 2009; Hamilakis 2011) and "ethnographies of archaeology practice" (Edgeworth 2003, 2006, 2010). Here, ethnographic strategies are explicitly employed to interrogate methodologies of archaeological intervention—its diverse practices and technologies to create knowledge about the past. *Bureaucratic Archaeology* extends these initiatives of ethnographic investigation of the "ecology of practices" (Stengers 2005; Olsen et al. 2012, 56; Witmore and Shanks 2013, 380), informed by the potential to decolonize methodology, practice, interpretation (Atalay 2006; Smith 2012), and postcolonial theory (Liebmann and Rizvi 2008; Lydon and Rizvi 2016) by dexterously shifting the site of inquiry from meta-narratives of archaeological theory to the ontological location where material culture is discovered, analyzed, and shaped into epistemology.

Ethnography of Archaeology as Bureaucracy

It was late one night when I reached Dholavira after a long journey of over 26 hours. The director of the site, who was sitting in the courtyard of a mud hut, greeted me, dressed in a warm woolen sweater, monkey-cap (ski-cap), pajamas, and Hawaii *chappal*s (flip-flops). It was the end of November and winter was snugly settling into this arid and dry belt of western India, with the nights becoming bitterly cold. He was sitting in a yellow molded plastic chair, in the company of his staff members—the two assistant archaeologists (AAs) present at the site, and a storekeeper. The director introduced me to the members of his

staff, who were crouched over a blue molded plastic table scattered with papers and notebooks, discussing the logistics of the next day's work. In the course of the introductions, he commented that it was a pity that I had reached the site late at night or I would have had my first glimpse of the archaeological site from at least a kilometer away. "Dholavira is the second largest Harappan site in India. It is mammoth [*ekdum vishal*]. You have never seen a Harappan site like this in your life," he energetically remarked. During my stay at Dholavira, almost all the archaeologists and the staff members talked about Dholavira as a site with a "stunning" (*dhaansu*) mound. Of all the stories that I heard about the monumental visuality of Dholavira, the most fascinating one was about an Indian Army general, who was on a scouting trip in this India–Pakistan border zone, flying above the site. He ordered his entourage of helicopters to land to take a whirlwind tour of the site. An AA, recounting this episode, noted that the army general had revealed that he had never seen such a large archaeological site in his life. When he glimpsed the site from "above" (*upar se*) he was tempted to land and tour the site on "foot" (*zameen par*).

ASI excavation sites, which come in many shapes and sizes—big (*bada*), small (*chota*), sunken (*daba*), and scattered (*bikhra*)—are the focal point of my ethnographic narrative. The excavation site is an epistemological terrestriality in which the materiality of the past is discovered, excavated, organized, qualified, labeled, catalogued, represented, and produced as objects of scientific archaeology. Through archaeological excavation, a landscape is carved out to produce an excavation site—scientific, performative, ideological, disciplinarian, and political in its display. The earth is divested of the unwanted and what remains is a spectacular *epistemic spatiality*. I focus my ethnographic intervention on this archetypal location of archaeology. Here, through sociological and epistemological micro-processes, archaeological materiality is transformed into an epistemic thing (Rheinberger 1997). Such an endeavor involves fathoming how a material culture comes into existence and how it is shaped as an artifact in the archaeological project. The ASI excavation site is not just another location of epistemic production; it is a scientifically symbolic, ideologically charged, hierarchical, and a bureaucratic embodiment of postcolonial archaeology. Here, the archaeological knowledge produced is simultaneously a product of the scientific trajectory of archaeological epistemology and the political genealogy of the postcolonial bureaucracy.

For the ASI archaeologist, the excavation site was conceived as an abstract macro-entity, whereas the trench was the micro-area, "where real [*asli*] archaeology happens." The director of the Dholavira site once underscored the ontological authenticity of the site: "Real archaeology is done in the trench. It is in the trench

where you connect with ancient civilization. The site is about the big picture. The trench is where you dirty your hands" (*hum apne haath trench ki mitti mein gande karte hai*). The director explained, "*The trench is the whole and soul of archaeology* [English words used]. If you cannot dig the trench properly, then the whole site will get messy [*agar trench kharab tarike se khoda toh poore site ka satyanaash ho jayega*]." The ethnographic description of this book further dovetails into the sociological and the epistemological working at this micro-site—the archaeological trench. For archaeology this is the most profound epistemological location, akin to the laboratory of the "real" sciences—the ontological site for archaeology—mediated by technology (instruments, equipment, tools), social factors (interests, goals, structures), and conceptual frameworks (representations, models, theories) that come together to produce empirical evidence. Here evidence is discovered, knowledge is created, and objectivity is performed. In the unearthing of accumulated material culture, ASI archaeologists generate empirical evidence for the construction of narratives.[11] Through the ethnography of micro-practices, I describe the process by which material culture in the trench-laboratory was recognized, discovered, and transformed into archaeological evidence. In the analysis that follows, I meticulously demonstrate how ASI archaeologists and workers in the trench-laboratory unearth material artifact as a controlled experiment and how they name the artifact, date it, and epistemologically fix it to a cultural context.

My ethnographic intervention in the archaeological site is grounded in the understanding of the scientific construction of knowledge as a social process interrogated by the discursive framework of the sociology of science. In the 1970s, indebted to the works of Robert Merton, influenced by the paradigmatic *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* by Thomas Kuhn (1965), and propelled into the forefront of science studies by the Edinburgh School's Strong Programme, the sociology of science and technology emerged as a significant disciplinary practice to comprehend the social structure of scientific knowledge production (Barnes 1974; Bloor 1976; Barnes and Shapin 1979). Scholars working in these traditions were concerned with apprehending how scientific knowledge is produced in laboratory, disciplinary, and broad social contexts, focusing on the method of scientific argumentations and negotiations. This inquiry has sought to demonstrate the inseparability between the social location and the manufacture of scientific knowledge. It established that scientific knowledge is constructed, maintained, determined, and shaped by cultural practices (Latour 1987; Haraway 1989, 1991; Pickering 1992; Fuller 1993, 1997).

In *Bureaucratic Archaeology*, I conceptualize the ASI archaeologists working in the archaeological sites as members of a specific "epistemic community"—