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Bureaucratic Archaeology

Bureaucratic Archaeology is a multi-faceted ethnography of quotidian practices of archaeology, bureaucracy, and science in postcolonial India, concentrating on the workings of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). This book uncovers an endemic link between the micro-practice of archaeology in the trenches of the ASI and the manufacture of archaeological knowledge, wielded in the making of political and religious identity and summoned as indelible evidence in the juridical adjudication in the highest courts of India. This book is a rare ethnography of the daily practice of a postcolonial bureaucracy from within rather than from the outside. It meticulously uncovers the social, cultural, political, and epistemological ecology of ASI archaeologists to show how the postcolonial state assembles and produces knowledge. This is the first book-length monograph on the workings of archaeology in a non-western world. It scrupulously shows how the theory of archaeological practice deviates, transforms, and generates knowledge outside the Euro-American epistemological tradition.

Ashish Avikunthak teaches at the University of Rhode Island and is a cultural anthropologist and filmmaker. He was named Future Greats 2014 by *ArtReview*. Subject of more than a dozen retrospectives and sixteen solo shows, his films have been shown in film festivals, galleries, and museums worldwide.

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Bureaucratic Archaeology

State, Science, and Past in Postcolonial India

Ashish Avikunthak

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For the unknown laborers in the archaeological trenches of India

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Preface

Sixth of December 1992 was an exuberantly bright day in Bombay. Winter had arrived calmly. Sultry, humid weather had given way to a pleasant, cool climate. I was working since dawn at Chaitya Bhoomi—the memorial of Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar located at the edge of the Arabian Sea, in the heart of Bombay. It was the 36th death anniversary of Ambedkar—the principal architect of the Indian constitution and, particularly, the revered leader of the Dalits, the lowest of the oppressive Hindu caste hierarchy. Like every year, a few hundred thousand devoted pilgrims gathered to pay their respects to the departed leader at the site where his last rites were conducted in 1956. The leafy, middle-class neighborhood of Dadar was bustling with multitudes that had journeyed overnight in trains, buses, and even by foot from neighboring districts in Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Andhra Pradesh. It was late afternoon; I was cautiously negotiating the massive crowd along with Dalit activists—assisting visitors, providing information about restrooms, food stalls, and train and bus stations. Unexpectedly, an associate of mine nervously rushed toward me through the teeming masses. He aggressively pushed through the crowd and scurried close to me. Gasping for breath, his face was contorted with fearful anxiety. He frantically announced: "Babri Masjid has been demolished! They tore it down! It happened a couple of hours ago." By the time all the activists regrouped, the enormous gathering was diminishing rapidly. The festive sprit that was stirring the energetic assembly had abruptly diffused. We sensed a palpable tension in the air. Those of us who were following the build-up of Hindu fundamentalists in the north Indian pilgrim town of Ayodhya over the past weeks were outraged. Not even in our wildest dream did we think that the government of India would allow the destruction of the disputed mosque.[1] By late evening, news of communal violence erupting in different parts of the country started pouring in. At midnight, rioting began. Muslim business establishment and shops on Lamington Road, in south-central Bombay where my hostel was located, were systematically targeted, ransacked, and looted. By the morning of December 7, riots had spread to different parts of the city. Bombay was burning.

In the next few days, the most widespread communal riots since the partition of India broke out throughout the country. Savage violence rocked Bombay in two cycles—the first, from December 6 to 12, 1992, and the second from January 6 to 20, 1993.[2] I saw the city scorched in front of my eyes. More than a thousand people were

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killed in these communal riots. Bombay changed. India changed. I changed. Forever. In the aftermath of the riots, I worked as a relief worker for six months. I assisted the victims of violence in some of the devastatingly affected Bombay suburbs (Bhandup, Ghatkopar, and Jogeshwari), procuring relief from the state government and aiding them in rehabilitation and restitution.[3] For the first time in my life, I viscerally experienced the stories that my parents narrated to me about the traumatic violence of partition. I belong to a refugee family. Both my parents' families were forced to abandon their homeland during the partition of India in 1947. My father's family moved from the Afghanistan–Pakistan border town of Hoti-Mardan in the North-Western Frontier Province (now called Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa) to towns in western Uttar Pradesh. My mother's family escaped from Lahore on the eve of partition in one of those blood-laced trains that have been immortalized in innumerable narratives of partition. They reached Delhi and lived in refugee settlements. Stories of death, terror, and trauma that were part of my imaginative universe unexpectedly became part of my daily reality. The genesis of this book began during my days in Bombay after the riots. My being was shaken with innumerable questions, as I worked in distressful relief camps, walked through charred slums, ravaged houses, and devastated neighborhoods. This book began as a journey in search of one question—what is the role of the past in the making of violence in India? This voyage took more than 26 years to unravel, taking me through the world of Indian politics, history, and, more importantly—archaeology, science, and bureaucracy.

A couple of years later, in the cold winter of 1994, during the third World Archaeological Congress (WAC 3) held at the Taj Mahal Hotel, New Delhi, I discovered the insinuating role archaeology played in the destruction of the Babri Masjid. As a young graduate student of archaeology, I was a delegate attending WAC 3—a gathering of international archaeologists held once in four years. The conference opened with disarray in organization, disordered logistics, and corruption allegations. Palpably, an unofficial gag order prohibiting any discussion on the demolition of the Babri Masjid was floating in the glittering corridors of the five-star hotel. I heard muted voices of dissent, and the simmering tension in the air threatened to disrupt the conference.[4] On the last day, during the plenary session held in the Taj Mahal Hotel's regal ballroom, fittingly called "Durbar Hall," tempers flared up; dreadfully.

An ugly fistfight broke out on the stage. The national and international delegates sat in stunned silence. Amid heated discussion and vociferous slogan shouting, a group of senior Indian archaeologists with graying hair and receding bald lines, wearing ill-fitted blazers, led by the diminutive Dr Braj Basi Lal and the belligerent Dr Swaraj Prakash Gupta, were seen rushing on to the stage. They snatched the microphone from the couple of Indian delegates who had come up the podium to read a petition for the WAC 3 to pass a resolution condemning the demolition of the Babri Masjid. The conference ended wretchedly, with the WAC Council boycotting

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the official closing ceremony in protest.[5] The demolition of the Babri Masjid was an ostracized topic for professional Indian archaeologists desperately seeking to preserve the discipline's credibility in front of international glare.[6] Sitting in that large ballroom of a five-star hotel in Delhi, with archaeologists from all across the world, the fraught relationship between archaeology and politics became acutely apparent to me. The question that I asked in Bombay took a sharper and concentrated focus. As a young archaeologist, I now deliberated what role archaeology played in the making of modern India. How is archaeology performed in postcolonial India? And this took me to the doorstep of one of the largest archaeological bureaucracies in the world—the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

The Babri Masjid was located in the early historic city of Ayodhya. The ASI excavated it in 1976–77 under the leadership of B. B. Lal as part of the contentious "Archaeology of the Ramayana Sites" (1970s), which had followed his controversial "Archaeology of Mahabharata Sites" (1950–52). Both these projects were precursors to the ideological formation of Hindutva archaeology, which attempted to archaeologically assert the veracity of the events that occurred in Hindu epic narratives. B. B. Lal's team undertook three seasons of excavations (1975–76, 1976–77, and 1979–80); however, no detailed report of the site was ever published. Only two minuscule reportages were published in the ASI's *Indian Archaeology: A Review* (*IAR*).[7] This excavation confirmed that Ayodhya was first occupied in seventh century BCE. Its most significant discovery was that of the earliest Jaina terracotta figurine (fourth century BCE) and Roman Rouletted Ware (first–second century CE). This showed that Ayodhya was not just part of the brisk ancient trade route, but it was a multicultural site (Shaw 2000). There was no mention of a Hindu temple at the site. The short excavation reportage ironically stated that the entire period after the eleventh century "was devoid of special interest" (*IAR 1976–77* 1980, 53).[8]

The archaeology of Ayodhya took the centerstage of Indian politics after 1986, when the doors of the Babri Masjid were unlocked and Hindu worshippers could enter after 37 years. By the late 1980s, the incendiary narrative that the first Mughal emperor, Babur (1483–1530), had destroyed an ancient temple marking the site of Ram's birthplace and constructed a mosque at the same spot became a political propaganda for the Hindu fundamentalist forces. The call for the demolition of the Babri Masjid became their war cry.[9] Other disputed structures such as the Gyanvapi Masjid in Varanasi and the Jama Masjid in Mathura were also being threatened. Both these mosques lie adjacent to venerable Hindu scared sites—the Kashi Vishwanath temple dedicated to Shiva in Varanasi and the Kesava Deo temple built at the birthplace of Krishna in Mathura respectively. Both these temple–mosque complexes, along with the Babri Masjid–Ram Janmabhoomi complex, were brought under the scanner of the political movement spearheaded by Hindu nationalist groups.

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In 1990, over 10 years after B. B. Lal had excavated Ayodhya, in an influential article in a Hindu propaganda journal, *Manthan*, he announced that he had recovered Hindu temple pillar-bases during the excavation (Lal 1980). Lal asserted his authority as an eminent ASI archaeologist behind his egregious claim that remains of a Hindu temple existed under the Babri Masjid. He provided false archaeological justification of the claim the Hindu fundamentalists were making about the Babri Masjid (Lal 2008). Archaeology was irrevocably pushed into the greatest political debate of postcolonial India. Lal's assertion about the presences of temple debris under the mosque had erupted an acrimonious debate amongst archaeologists and historians in India. On the one hand, Lal led a group of historians and archaeologists along with his collaborator and self-proclaimed Hindu nationalist archaeologist, S. P. Gupta, who provided archaeological justification to the political project of Hindu fundamentalism (Gupta 1994). On the other hand, K. M. Shrimali, Irfan Habib, and others argued that empirical evidence in the archaeological and material cultural record was misinterpreted to produce a skewed account of the past (Ratnagar 2004). The debates were unambiguously rancorous. Ideological fault lines were drawn deep and the politics of the past in India became hostile. By the mid-1990s, Indian archaeology had become a tainted discipline—its discursive legitimacy compromised and undermined—burdened under cavernous epistemological duress, caught in political crossfires between nationalist appropriation and the empirics of a scientific discipline.

It came as an unpleasant surprise to the officers of the ASI, nine years later in 2003, when the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court ordered the ASI to excavate under the demolished debris of the Babri Masjid. Was there a temple under the mosque? The High Court demanded evidence (Khan, Agarwal, and Sharma 2010, xix–xxxii). Unexpectedly, the judiciary dragged the ASI into the epicenter of the greatest confrontation about the past in India. The 2003 archaeological excavation of Ayodhya by the ASI was the most unusual excavation in the history of the organization. The conditions were so abnormal that the ASI archaeologist heading the excavation wrote a special note in the introductory chapter of the Ayodhya excavation report in a section revealingly titled: "Constraints" (Manjhi and Mani 2003, 9–11). What would have taken any ASI Excavation Branch in an analogous medieval site in north India three to four season of work (around 400–500 days of digging) was excavated in less than 150 days from March to August 2003. It was agonizing to work uninterruptedly during the penetratingly hot summer months followed by the wet and humid monsoon season. Excavations were conducted under a thick canopy of plastic sheets, lighted by the sharp glare of high-power halogen lamps, cooled only by buzzing industrial fans. ASI archaeologists dug in 20-meter-deep dark trenches in sweltering conditions, which prevented them from making accurate observation.[10] This was aggravated by continuous surveillance and the daily intrusion

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of the numerous representatives of the feuding parties overseeing minute details of the excavation. The national media reported every potshard discovered, making this one of the most reported archaeological excavations in Indian history. The excavation site represented a military operation. Local police and paramilitary forces of Uttar Pradesh and the central government guarded the location zealously. Some ASI archaeologists abandoned the excavation midway because of unbearable stress levels. The ASI excavated a staggering 98 trenches, or close to 10,000 square meters, and recovered many thousand antiquities, ceramics of different periods, coins, architectural fragments, terracotta objects, figurines, and bones. The astonishing nature of public fascination with the excavation and, crucially, the judiciary's belief in archaeology's ability to unearth the truth about the past intrigued me. Juridical dependence on archaeology in disputes about property and cultural remains was not unusual. This was common in North America—laws such as the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) juridically justified archaeological excavations (Fine-Dare 2002)—but this was the first time in India.

The Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court in 2010, and subsequently the Supreme Court of India in 2019, instrumentally deployed the finding of the unpublished ASI Ayodhya excavation report to adjudicate that a monumental Hindu temple complex existed under the medieval mosque. The finding of the ASI—a staid but gargantuan bureaucracy of the Indian state—played a pivotal role in deciding the most important question of postcolonial Indian politics. The ASI was a slow-moving bureaucratic juggernaut, responsible not only for preserving the archaeological heritage in India, but, prominently, producing massive empirical knowledge about the Indian past. The ASI excavated large swaths of ancient sites. It uncovered monumental structures, generated millions of artifacts, and produced a large volume of scholarly literature. Although it was predominantly a heritage conservation bureaucracy, it gained enormous legitimacy and prestige through the production of scientific knowledge about the past—data, information, facts, evidence—disseminated through the publication of articles, reports, and surveys. It was the ASI's archaeological ability that "provides scientific factual data for reconstructing ancient historical material, culture, understanding" (Khan, Agarwal, and Sharma 2010, 2375) which qualified it to be summoned by the highest courts of India to provide evidence (Supreme Court 2019, 552). As a knowledge producing organization, civilizational questions rather than local or topical issues drove its epistemological inquiry. However, by being pushed into national limelight, the ASI's politics of practice unexpectedly received unprecedented scrutiny. The past was always a contested domain in India, but the practice of archaeology by the ASI with the Ayodhya dispute took an unparalleled center stage of political and nationalistic discourse in India.

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The terrestrial location of this book's ethnographic inquiry is not the ASI excavations of Ayodhya, but the far-flung excavation sites belonging to the Indus civilization or the Harappan civilization that the ASI has been excavating since the 1920s. ASI excavations at Ayodhya were an anomaly; however, the excavations at Harappan sites were part of its routine archaeological work for nearly a century. The discovery of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa radically altered India's civilizational history, pushing it back by as far as 2,000 years than previously known.[11] The scientific justification provided by archaeology gave this discovery an objective legitimization, whose profound impact continues to reverberate in the imagination of postcolonial South Asia. Through the Harappan civilization, archaeology bestowed colonial Indians with an unbroken cultural legacy of more than 5,000 years and provided a subjugated people with a history that was older than that of their colonial occupiers. This intersection of scientific archaeology and ideology transformed the discourse on Harappan culture into a contested location for multiple theories and myths—nationalistic, imperialistic, postcolonial, and, now, ultra-nationalist.

Between 2003 and 2005, I conducted ethnography at Harappan sites in Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Haryana, which formed the core of a short-lived but controversial project undertaken by the ASI—the Saraswati Heritage Project (SHP)—with the goal of searching for the lost civilization of the Vedic Aryans (the authors of ancient Vedic literature). By remapping archaeological evidence from the prehistoric Harappan civilization (c. 3800–2000 BCE) on to textual evidence from the oldest Vedic literature (c. 1500 BCE), this project attempted to both debunk the Aryan migration theory and push back the dates of the Vedic Aryans to an earlier period, creating an entirely new category of the indigenous "Vedic Harappans" (Singh 1995). Moreover, in scientifically linking archaeological evidence to religiosity, this project also attempted to validate the latter's historicity and, in the process, shifted the territorial locus of the Indus civilization (mainly located in Pakistan) to within Indian boundaries. This contentious history of Harappan archaeology forms the narrative web over which the anthropological account is described in this book.

The ASI's excavations at Ayodhya and the SHP are not incommensurable to the ethnographic narrative of my book; they instead complement each other. Both are products of the bureaucratic archaeology of the ASI; both mark a culmination of convoluted networks between archaeology as a scientific discipline and religious and national fundamentalism; both are exemplary examples of statist manufacture of archaeological knowledge in postcolonial India. The discovery of the Harappan civilization by the ASI in the 1920s and the subsequent consolidation of scientific archaeology by the colonial archaeologist-bureaucrat Mortimer Wheeler in the 1940s laid the foundation for this statist archaeological practice. After 1947, ASI archaeology was reinforced by the burgeoning postcolonial bureaucracy and eventually maneuvered by ASI archaeologists harboring Hindutva allegiance to pursue their

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ideological objectives. By the time I conducted my ethnographic investigation, these divergent currents were acutely intertwined in the making of the ASI's knowledge production apparatus. The SHP and Ayodhya are epistemological embodiments of this complex process. Furthermore, the ramifications of Ayodhya's excavation were felt during my ethnographic work in the SHP sites, not just ideologically but also socially, because most of my informants had worked at the Ayodhya excavation, and that experience had significantly impacted their professional life. It is in these complex political and historical conditions that the ethnographic narrative of the book unfolds.

Bureaucratic Archaeology is an ethnographic investigation of the ASI's micro-politics of epistemic practice. In this book, I show how empirical archaeological evidence produced by the ASI in Harappan sites—epistemologically homologous to those utilized by the highest courts of Indian judiciary to adjudicate the presence of a temple under a mosque as an empirical fact—is manufactured in the dusty and deep trenches of ASI excavations. The archaeological practices of the ASI have been questioned, debated, and disputed in the quagmire of the Indian public sphere. This book steps into this contested world and provides a critical, theoretically nuanced, empirically rich insight into the making of meaning about the past in contemporary India. It is an anthropological investigation of archaeology as a bureaucratic practice in the times of science, religion, and politics. I meticulously follow archaeological material culture discovered in ASI trenches to its transformation into empirical facts published in statist reports and employed as official evidence in courts. The journey from excavated materiality to published epistemology, as I show in this book, is mediated by the complex conjunction of scientific and bureaucratic practices of the postcolonial state, negotiating the institutional world of the ASI, fraught with troubled colonial legacy, turgid governmental machinery, and entrenched disenchantment amongst its rank and file. Through painstaking ethnographic observation, I lay open this social, cultural, and scientific universe of postcolonial archaeologists and demonstrate the impact of bureaucratic ontologies on epistemological practices.

The focal point of my ethnographic lens is the ASI excavation site. It is in this epistemic location that scientific practice and bureaucratic rationality conjoin to produce postcolonial archaeology. It is at the excavation site that the material artifacts of the past are discovered, excavated, organized, qualified, labeled, catalogued, represented, and produced as objects of scientific archaeology. Employing everyday micro-practices at the excavation sites as the modality of ethnographic investigation, I show that the epistemology of archaeology in India is a product of a postcolonial bureaucratic rationality where science, state, and religion are ingeniously contrived to manufacture a nation with a seemingly empirical past. This meaning-making of the past, I argue, is not only an embodiment of a practice carried out by an unyielding bureaucracy acutely entrenched in the culture of a hegemonic state,

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but is also the product of the disciplinarian discourse of archaeology that has an ambivalent relationship between materiality and epistemology. I answer a few fundamental questions in this book: How does the ASI do archaeology? How does the ASI manufacture data, evidence, and facts about the Indian past? What kind of techniques, methodologies, and practices does it employ? What are the sociological, political, and the ideological processes of its knowledge production mechanism? More scrupulously, this book investigates how the ASI conducts excavations. How does it discover artifacts in a trench? How are artifacts transformed into facts? Or succinctly, this book investigates how the ASI *acts* in the making of *artifacts* into *facts*.

Structure of the Book

In this book, I make theoretical and causality-based arguments between ideology and practice; therefore, it is critical to proceed step-by-step, gradually and systematically enabling the ethnographic evidence to speak for themselves. Chapters 1 and 2 outline the theoretical, historical, and political intersections of the book's epistemological landscape. Subsequently, my observations, arguments, and assertions are progressively uncovered ethnographically, from Chapters 3 to 9, in a meticulous sequence. Chapters 3 and 4 consist of thick descriptions of the ASI as a bureaucratic organization and probes into the social and the cultural ecology of ASI archaeologists, whereas the ethnography of Chapters 5 to 9 minutely examines the micro-practices of the ASI's bureaucratic archaeology. Finally, the narrative of the manuscript arrives at the Conclusion of the book, where I close with statements of my findings and their implications on the state of Indian archaeology today.

Chapter 1, "Anthropology of Archaeology," provides the theoretical and methodological framework of the book and elucidates the political impetus of my anthropological intervention. It situates the book at the intersection of science studies, archaeology, postcolonial studies, and the ethnography of the state. It locates the anthropological genealogy of the project envisaged as a post-Kuhnian, Latourian, postcolonial investigation of archaeology as a bureaucratic science. It also provides a historical overview of the state of Indian archaeology in the context of the ASI and charts the transformation of the colonial ASI into a postcolonial bureaucracy. This section gives a brief overview of the organizational history of the ASI, and its contemporary administrative structure. It delineates the transformation of a minor colonial organization of the late nineteenth century into a formidable bureaucratic institution of the early twenty-first century.

Chapter 2, "The Making of the Indus–Saraswati Civilization," locates the contested politics of Harappan archaeology by examining the epistemological emergence of the River Saraswati and interrogating its historical and ideological relationship to Harappans and Aryans. It argues that the epistemic trajectory of the Saraswati from a literary entity to an empirical category followed four phases.

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First, it emerged as a mythical river of colonial Indology; second, as a civilizational river of colonial archaeology; third, as a hydrological body of postcolonial geology; and, fourth, as an empirical fact of postcolonial archaeology and history. Contrary to historians who attribute the resurrection of the Saraswati solely to the growing influence of Hindutva ideologies, this chapter argues that the Saraswati is also an epistemic product of the disciplinarian discourse of colonial Indology and postcolonial science. This chapter outlines the historical and political contours through which the subsequent ethnography navigates. At the end of this chapter, I describe the four SHP excavation sites where I did my ethnographic work—Dholavira, Hansi, Baror, and Bhirrana. I provide descriptions of each site, their significance within the archaeology of the Harappan civilization, the research plan of the ASI for each site, and the nature of the materiality discovered.

Chapter 3, "Bureaucratic Hierarchy in the ASI," is a critical examination of the organizational hierarchy of the ASI, and the impact of its authoritarian structure on the lives of archaeologists who spend their entire careers working for this organization. Assistant archaeologists, superintending archaeologists, and director generals, along with archaeological laborers, are some key characters of this chapter. Their professional careers, lives in the field and in the office, relationship with their colleagues—subordinates and superiors—their ambitions, scholarly and professionally, and their frustrations are evocatively employed to describe the domineering authority of postcolonial bureaucracy. I show how the bureaucratic hierarchy of the state shapes the professional subjectivity of archaeologists and produces disenchanted archaeologists, despondently struggling with the task of creating knowledge. This chapter reveals the social and cultural world of bureaucratic archaeologists and argues that the institutional apparatus of the postcolonial state does not differentiate between the subjects it employs and the subjects it governs. The oppressive impact of its institution was pervasive, and its influence was exerted on all the members that constituted its structural apparatus.

In Chapter 4, "Spatial Formation of the Archaeological Field," I show that the ASI's archaeological excavation is a *(post)colonial exploration project*—a genre of colonial science which emphasized that the *real* process of knowledge production is situated outside the domains of the metropole at the fringes of the nation. This chapter destabilizes the conception of archaeological fieldwork defined in epistemological terms and demonstrates that such fieldwork involves an ideological engagement with the landscape. I show how the spatial formation of the archaeological excavation, with its physical dialectics between the campsite and the excavation site, governs the epistemological framework of the archaeological project. Here, I destabilize the notion of the field and argue that, in the context of the archaeological field, non-epistemic locations like the campsite are equally, if not more, important than the excavation site. Because the field in archaeology has always been conceptualized as *(field)work*,

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the non-epistemic locations in the field have been ignored in the scholarship on fieldwork. Through a spatial analysis of the archaeological field, I argue that the archaeological project, from its inception, involves an ideological manipulation of the landscape, evident in the archaeologist's choice of excavation sites, acquisition of private land, erection of camps, and demarcation of excavation zones through tangible boundaries between archaeologists and the local people.

In Chapter 5, "Epistemological Formation of the Archaeological Site," I demonstrate how a "wild landscape" at the fringes of the nation is first discovered as a site and then domesticated by the institutional apparatus of postcolonial governmentality into a materialized epistemic space—an excavation site—an ideologically framed spatial regime of inscription. This process is brought about through the application of what in ASI parlance is called the "Wheeler method"—a practice through which an untamed landscape is rationalized and brought within the encompassing grasp of Cartesian perspectivalism. Introduced in Indian archaeology by Sir Mortimer Wheeler—the ebullient military-archaeologist who revolutionized the practice of colonial archaeology in India as a scientific enterprise during his tenure as the director general of the ASI between 1944 and 1948—the Wheeler method systematically converted the undomesticated landscape into a scientific laboratory, whereby the generated data could be confined, controlled, and codified. In this archaeological laboratory, facts and artifacts about pasts could be accurately documented and scientifically retrieved by keeping a detailed three-dimensional record of the finds. I argue that this transformation of a wild landscape into an excavation site not only controlled the archaeological epistemology but also controlled the ontology of the very subjects who produced knowledge.

In Chapter 6, "Theory of Archaeological Excavation," I localize my ethnographic narrative from the wider landscape of the excavation site into the narrow confines of the trench—the archaeological laboratory. I shift my focus from the epistemic landscape to the epistemic square. Through an ethnography of micro-practices, I describe the process by which material culture in the trench-laboratory is recognized, discovered, and transformed into archaeological evidence. The theoretical framework of this practice is the concept of stratigraphy—the geological principle through which archaeological materiality is chronologically dated. I argue that the systematic scientific process in the micro-context of the trench-laboratory that produces material evidence for the construction of the narrative of the past is a practice dependent on a non-objective idea of time and space.

In Chapter 7, "Making of the Archaeological Artifact," I minutely 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. Here, I discuss the terminological difference between artifact and "antiquity," structural remains and "monuments,"

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and archaeological traces and "archaeological features," to distinguish between the disciplinary discourse of archaeology and the ASI's reconfiguration of the practice. It details the daily practice of ASI archaeology in the excavation site focusing on the process through which artifacts and structures are recognized, discovered, recorded, and measured at the site. I focus on the practice of how an artifact becomes a fact.

In Chapter 8, "Performance of Archaeological Representations," I argue that the ritual of the state and its fetish for superficial perfection subsumes daily practices of archaeology. ASI archaeologists engaged in the performative practice of presenting and (re)presenting the evidence they unearthed. At a minute level, this comprised of rituals of photography and drawing at the site—of the artifacts, trenches, stratigraphy, and the excavation site. At a spectacular scale, this consisted of site visits by visiting dignitaries and officials, from the local district magistrate to the chief minister of the state. These diverse performative strategies were simultaneously aimed at the epistemic articulation of the archaeological site as an ideological location of state performance and the representation of excavated material culture as scientific evidence. The excavated site was transformed into an arena of spectatorial performance where the precision of scientific archaeology along with the statist power was exalted in uncovering the ancient civilization that made up the nation. This spectatorial ritual was an essential post-excavation process of the ASI archaeological intervention and it deployed the performative aspect of the excavation site to further the ideological and epistemological goal of the statist organization.

In Chapter 9, "The Absent Excavation Reports," I synthesize the major arguments in this book by concentrating on the final epistemological artifact of ASI archaeology—the excavation report. I employ the unpublished and controversial ASI's Ayodhya excavation report of 2003 as an epistemological site to underscore the foremost argument of this book, that, in postcolonial India, ASI archaeology was a structural construct of bureaucratic governmentality rather than a knowledge-producing epistemological practice. I show how the logic of bureaucratic corruption outlines the contours of an excavation project in the ASI.

Finally, I have fashioned the narrative of this monograph by bookending the history and political genealogy of ASI archaeology (this Preface, Chapters 1–2, Chapter 9, and Conclusion), which envelops the ethnographic account of ASI archaeology (Chapters 3–9). The anthropological core of the book is the thick description of archaeological practice, ensconced within a bureaucratic ecology of the ASI. This postcolonial bureaucratic archaeology is politically engendered by the Hindutva ideology that is personified by the ASI's intervention in the SHP and Ayodhya.

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1. According to the sequence of events listed in the Liberhan Ayodhya Commission of Inquiry, the earliest "assault" on the disputed structure occurred at 12:15 p.m. The first dome of the mosque was demolished by 1:55 p.m (Liberhan 2009, 254–55). By 2:30 p.m., the news of the demolition spread in Bombay. This report is the definite account of the Indian state's investigation into the causes that led to the destruction of the Babri Masjid, which took 17 years to write (1992–2009).
2. See the *Report of the Srikrishna Commission* (1998) for a detailed chronology of the riots as it raged in different parts of the city. This is one of the most comprehensive documentation of the Bombay riots. The Government of Maharashtra under the Congress regime instituted it in 1993. It indicted the Shiv Sena and Hindu fundamentalists for instigating, aggravating, and conducting riots. Also, see Engineer (1993) and Masselos (1994) about the key distinction between the first and the second phase of riots.
3. I was then a student of social work at the College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan, Bombay University, which was designated by the Government of Maharashtra as the primary nodal agency to route non-governmental organization (NGO) intervention during the post-riot relief work. For a report of the intervention by the College of Social Work, see Joseph (2000).
4. See Lal (2001) and Sharma (2001) for two opposing views on the Ayodhya dispute; both these papers were presented at WAC 3.
5. For multiple perspectives and different voices on the events of WAC 3, see Muralidharan (1994); Rao (1994, 1999); Hassan (1995); Colley (1995); and Golson (1996).
6. The Indian organizational committee for WAC 3 consisted of S. P. Gupta, B. B. Lal, and Makkhan Lal along with ASI functionaries like J. P. Joshi and M. C Joshi, who were reported to be close to the Hindu right-wing Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). This committee thwarted attempts to hold any session pertaining to the destruction of the mosque and the ethics of archaeology. For a comprehensive account of backdoor machinations pertaining to WAC 3, see Navlakha (1994).
7. *Indian Archaeology: A Review* is the official publication of the ASI, edited by the director general (DG) of the ASI. First published in 1954, it is the annual publication of the ASI, in which the account of the various archaeological works is reported.
8. See *IAR 1976–77* 1980, 52–53; *IAR 1979–80* 1983, 76–77 for specific reports on the Ayodhya excavations.
9. Here, I am not using "war cry" metaphorically, but categorically. Numerous slogans were heard during those years, which explicitly called for the destruction

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of the mosque. Some of the most popular ones were: *Ram naam satya hai/Babri Masjid dhvasth hai* (Ram's name is truth/Babri Masjid is destroyed); *Ek dhakka aur do/Babri Masjid tod do* (Give another push/Break the Babri Masjid); *Mitti nahin khiskayenge/Dhancha tor kar jayange* (We will not move earth/We will break the structure).

10. For instance, in a letter dated July 3, 2003, Gauri Chatterjee, the DG of the ASI, writes to Rajeev Kumar, District Commissioner of Faizabad:

> … you are requested to ensure that there is proper height of "Shamiyana" so that there is enough light and air for persons working in excavation trenches. You may in consultation with Shri Hari Manjhi, Director, ASI, Team Leader, Ayodhya Excavation, remove these from northern, western and eastern sides so that there is sufficient light in recognizing stratigraphical features and details on cuttings. (AACD, File No. 29/1/95-Pt IV)

11. The Indus civilization is also known as the Harappan civilization, Indus Valley civilization, Indus–Saraswati civilization, and Sindhu–Saraswati civilization—each of these names has potent political and ideological genealogies. John Marshall, the DG of the ASI (1902–28) who excavated Mohenjo-Daro, had earlier used the term "Indo-Sumerian" to signal the cultural relationship between the Indus and the Sumerians. However, in 1931, he adopted the term "Indus civilization." Ernst Mackay, who had excavated both Mohenjo-Daro and Chanhudaro, called it "Harappa Culture," following the archaeological type-site convention of naming a culture/civilization by the site where it was discovered for the first time (Mackay 1943); this term was subsequently made popular by Stuart Piggott in his well-known book *Prehistoric India to 1000 B.C.* (Piggott 1950). Throughout this book, I also follow the type-site convention and use the term "Harappan."

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Acknowledgments

This book is the end product of a 25-year long journey that oscillated between the disciplinary boundaries of archaeology, anthropology, science studies, and postcolonial studies, meandering though many enriching institutional homes that bestowed me with their munificence, accruing incalculable debt of inspiring teachers, affable colleagues, steadfast friends, and a supportive family.

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At Stanford University (1999–2007), I was extremely fortunate to work with two of the foremost thinkers of theoretical archaeology—Ian Hodder and Michael Shanks—both had arrived from England the same year I reached Stanford. Over the course of eight years, Ian was not just a sympathetic and astute adviser but also an intellectual benefactor of my theoretical eccentricities. Michael Shanks not only sharpened my critical faculties but was also a strong advocate of my cinematic works. He was a constant source of cerebral and theoretical insights at a number of forums, including the Stanford Humanities Center's workshops on Visual Anthropology and Critical New Media. Akhil Gupta's shrewd advice, both scholarly and practical, have been valuable for seeing this work through; Ewa Domanska's annual visitations to Stanford from Poland in the spring brought in fresh "theory" that has inevitably permeated into the conceptual substratum of this book; Shiv Visvanathan's brief visit in Spring 2003 and numerous engaging conversations with him in Stanford and subsequently in Ahmedabad are deeply treasured.

My career at Stanford was linked to the genesis of two academic experiments—the Cultural and Social Anthropology (CASA) department and the Stanford Archaeology Centre. I had the enviable privilege to be part of both these intellectually invigorating communities, which have shaped my thinking. The buzzing excitement of the newly

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evolving Archaeology Centre, with its constant stream of visitors from the world of archaeology, eclectic workshops, intense student conferences, with a slew of exciting course offerings, had a great impact on my academic life at Stanford. I would like to generously thank John Rick for allowing me to work at the exhilaratingly enchanting Andean site of Chavín de Huántar, Peru (first millennium BCE), and Ian Morris for providing me the opportunity to work at the pre-Hellenic site of Monte Polizzo, Italy (sixth century BCE). The erstwhile CASA with its close-knit community and theoretically stimulating environment has played an important role in shaping my anthropological practice. I would like to thank the late Hayden White, Tim Lenoir, Gregory Schopen, Renato Rosaldo, Paulla Ebron, Lynn Meskell, and Miyako Inoue for taking keen interest in my work. The years at Stanford would have been socially insular if not for the many friends who shared their life and times with me—Suraj Jacob, Pankaj Gupta, Madhav Ranganathan, Ijaz Syed, Shailini Gera, Ali Hasan Cemendtaur, Sabahat Ashraf, Maya Dodd, Manishita Dass, Mukta Sharangpani, Tim Webmoor, Chris Witmore, Shubhra Swarup, Heraz Marafatia, Tania Chattopadhya, Pushkin Chattopadhya, Manju Chattopadhya, Pawan and Meghna Kumar, Itamar Francez, Nama Rokem, Fernando Armstrong-Fumero, Dante Alejandro Angelo, Tiffany Romain, Katrinka Reinhart, Angad Singh Bhalla, and Neepa Acharya.

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(2002) and *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (2011). I thank the editors and reviewers of these articles for their comments and observations.

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Providence, 2020

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Note on Transliteration

The conversations in this ethnography were conducted in English and Hindi. All translations from Hindi to English and vice versa are my own. I have employed a simple and contemporary transliteration system for Hindi words that do not use diacritics. I have tried to incorporate the sound-values of the letters and the acute and grave accents within the Romanization process. This system does not distinguish between long and short vowels or between dental and retroflex consonants.

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Abbreviations

AA	assistant archaeologist
AACD	ASI Archive Collection, New Delhi
ADG	additional director general
AIIS	American Institute of Indian Studies
ASA	assistant superintending archaeologist
ASI	Archaeological Survey of India
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CBI	Central Bureau of Investigation
CABA	Central Advisory Board of Archaeology
CAC	Central Antiquity Collection
CAG	Comptroller and Auditor General of India
Dy SA.	deputy superintending archaeologist
DG	director general
Ex. Br.	excavation branch
IAS	Indian Administrative Service
IAR	Indian Archaeology: A Review
Jt DG	joint director general
LDC	lower division clerk
MLA	member of the legislative assembly
MP	member of parliament
NAGPRA	Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act
OBC	Other Backward Classes
OSL	optically stimulated luminescence
PWD	Public Works Department
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SA	superintending archaeologist

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SSC	Staff Selection Commission
SHP	Saraswati Heritage Project
TA	technical assistant
UDC	upper division clerk
UGC	University Grants Commission

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