

Felicitating A Legendary Archaeologist

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Texts and Archaeology: Fulfilling a Collaborative Need

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Introduction

The “written” works of the past three thousand years in the Indian subcontinent present a variety of challenges to those who use them in conjunction with archaeological evidence. Any text that we see in a printed document today has undergone numerous transformations from the time in which it was first created: oral traditions that were transcribed and recopied may combine many generations of copyists’ revisions and additions, while political and religious texts offer prescriptions that may not have been actualized. Even stone inscriptions, which are transmitted to us in their original form, contain ambiguities due to fragmentation, weathering, and translation. This paper focuses on the writings preserved from the first era of extensive physical records, the Early Historic period (ca. 3rd century BC to 4th century AD). Among these, political treatises are likely to have preserved an idealized concept of social order, while religious and poetic texts were likely to have been copied and preserved because of their resonance with actual conditions. The different textual traditions are evaluated with reference to the archaeological site of Siśupālgarh in eastern India, where local inscriptions can be compared with administrative and literary texts.

Prof. B.B. Lal’s long and distinguished career has encompassed not only an attention to the meticulous details of archaeological fieldwork over the course of many projects and sites, but also the desire to integrate that fieldwork with the words of the ancients in order to bring the past alive. A number of years ago, taking into account the richness of both archaeological data and historical texts that often are studied to the exclusion of one another, he urged his fellow researchers to engage in projects that integrate history and archaeology in a process of “planned cooperation.”¹ He encouraged

a mutual dialogue amongst textual and archaeological scholars as a mechanism for “a holy and sacred mission, namely that of ascertaining the truth”.²

Prof. Lal’s laudable goal of collaboration brings together two very different scholarly worlds in ways that require thoughtful assessment of the assumptions held by each. We may start with the ways that archaeologists could make their findings more accessible to historians. When we survey a region or excavate a site, the archaeological remains are always a palimpsest of ancient times, represented primarily by a few courses of stone or brick interspersed with artifact fragments that serve as the vestiges of once-living contexts. We should better explain why we often have foundations rather than whole buildings (because walls collapse and ancient people both modified buildings and reused architectural materials) and how environmental factors such as floods, vegetation growth, and subsequent human activities have impacted archaeological sites. Fragmentary finds, often quite exciting to archaeologists, need to be contextualized on the human scale of lived economic and social experiences through reconstructions that can include artists’ depictions as well as three-dimensional and digital representations.

Archaeologists also should more clearly explain why the study of chronology is central to our work, and why scientific techniques such as radiocarbon dating come with a plus-minus range as an expected part of the dating process (and that when we speak of an “error range” it is not an indictment of the procedure but instead a scientific term that should be understood as the probabilistic range of variability that results from measuring radioactive decay in a sample of ancient organic materials). Our routine inclusion of a black-and-white scale in field photographs often goes unexplained, as well as the acknowledgment that photographs may capture some but not all of the exposed archaeological materials.³ Even quite basic fieldwork conventions, such as excavating with baulks, results in visual effects that may be puzzling to our text-based colleagues.

Historical Texts and Archaeological Inquiry

Just as the assumptions and practices of archaeological research can be puzzling to the textual scholar, the unspoken conventions of literary studies can make it challenging for the archaeologist to confidently integrate textual sources. The types and amounts of ancient writing are quite variable, meaning that the existence of what appears to be a written tradition may be difficult to compare with archaeological remains. The earliest script, dating to the Bronze Age Indus period around 2500 BC, has not been deciphered despite many attempts. The next known textual phase is the Vedic literature, whose date of 1000 to 1200 BC was established by Sanskrit scholars on the basis of how much they thought languages change over time.⁴ However, no actual extant copies of written documents exist from that time. The next substantial literary phase is represented by the epic poems, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, perhaps composed in the middle of the first millennium BC but similarly not written down until many centuries later. These were followed by an increasing variety of poems and prose works on kingship, ritual, medicine, love, and duty that comprise the South Asian textual tradition of the Early Historic period (ca. 3rd century BC to 4th century AD). It is only in the Early Historic period that we have the first tangible written documents, appearing in the form of the Aśokan inscriptions engraved on rocky hillsides and on polished stone pillars.⁵

There are thousands of other inscriptions of the Early Historic period throughout the subcontinent and Sri Lanka, many of them associated with religious structures. Archaeologists are continually adding to the corpus of stone inscriptions; even Aśokan edicts, arguably the most famous type of stone inscription, are still being found.⁶ Stone inscriptions appear as fixed or “frozen” texts that provide a direct statement of political leadership and religious practices.⁷ But interpretations can be challenging, because translations have nuances that vary from one translator to another and from one era to another.⁸ Even the transcriptions upon which translations are based are subject to scholarly differences, with some ambiguities introduced by the fact that the stones on which inscriptions have been made are scarred or cracked, leading to variant readings of the actual ancient letters.⁹

We also should remember that although stone inscriptions appear to have been a perfectly clear statement of some past event or activity, the contents were not necessarily widely accessible to ancient people. The concept of literacy was new in the Early Historic period, and initial inscriptions might have been obscure or puzzling to local inhabitants. Inscriptions were first made in local dialects (known as *Prākṛits*), in which the types of language chosen for the inscription may have made it difficult for people to read. For example, the Aśokan inscriptions in southern India were written in a language associated with the Gangetic plain and thus not likely to have been as widely known by those in whose midst the inscriptions were placed.¹⁰ Although Sanskrit was in use as a spoken language at least since the Vedic period, it was not used for inscriptions until later.¹¹ This linguistic shift may signal a significant change in either the audience or the aims of the writers of these inscriptions.

With regards to texts transcribed in manuscripts rather than stone, there are many additional potential sources of confusion for the archaeologist wishing to make use of texts. There seems to be no single source to identify all the different names or types of texts in the South Asian tradition, and to the uninitiated, it may appear that the *Laws of Manu*, the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*, and the *Manusmṛti* are three different works rather than the same document. Some of this confusion is not the fault of textual scholars but the result of manuscript transmissions and renamings that have been handed down along with different versions of the text itself.¹² Anthologies of South Asian literature often are organized by theme, such as love or urbanism, in which the relationship among texts is downplayed. Sorting through Buddhist literature is particularly challenging since editors of those texts appear to assume that the reader is already well-versed in the intricacies of Buddhist doctrine. Jain texts are somewhat more accessible, in part because they are presented in a way that does not presume a highly specialized audience already familiar with the categorizations of works.

Many components of the South Asian literary traditions appear to have diversified almost immediately after initial composition, whether those traditions were ritual or folkloric, resulting in a vast quantity of texts. The resultant critical edition of a literary work should not be a search for an elusive and perhaps non-existent original master text, but instead a document that “reflects the complete picture of the textual development.”¹³ Closely related to the question of textual diversity is the question of chronology. The dating of literary and historical texts can be controversial because the written forms that are available to us now passed through a number of recitations, repetitions and copyings through which additions and interpolations were added by later individuals.¹⁴ The length of time from the initial development of a poem or ritual text to the time in which it was preserved through

writing could be extremely long; for example, the *Rāmāyaṇa* was probably composed between 750 and 500 BCE, but “the earliest extant *Rāmāyaṇa* manuscript dates only to the eleventh century CE.”¹⁵ As a result, there can be more than a thousand years of disjuncture between the original composition of a work and the oldest extant copies.

Perishable manuscripts come from many locations, including outside the subcontinent. The earliest Buddhist texts, for example, can be tracked down through manuscripts throughout much of Asia, including China, Tibet, Central Asia, Burma, and Southeast Asia. The Buddhist textual traditions represent so many texts and diverse canons that they could be thought of as a library rather than a simple textual assemblage.¹⁶ The phenomenon of textual proliferation is compounded for non-liturgical texts that were not dependent on literal repetition and where “migration” through the subcontinent and beyond has resulted in hundreds of different versions.¹⁷ Disagreements exist about which texts belong together in collections; for example, the apparently simple question “how many Upanishads are there?” has elicited answers ranging from a dozen to over two hundred.¹⁸

For archaeologists, a plurality of exemplars and a broad classification can be helpful, as they are for physical remains. Interpretations of artifacts and architecture are reinforced when additional exemplars of ancient houses, temples, workshops or even pottery styles become known, enabling us to ascertain the material traditions adopted throughout a broad geographical expanse. Thus, for archaeologists, any newly-found artifact or structure is important because it adds to the corpus of known exemplars in a positive way. Are textual scholars equally enthused about finding exact copies located in different places, not only because it adds to the knowledge of the text, but because it adds to the picture of the distribution and tenacity of its contents for those who read and knew it? And are textual scholars engaged in processes of database creation that provides updated lists of new textual and manuscript finds?

Archaeological research is cumulative, and there are many sources of publication and dissemination that enable us to learn about new discoveries, including conferences and the venerable publication of annual activities encapsulated in the Archaeological Survey of India’s *Indian Archaeology - A Review*. The same cumulative effect is felt in the discovery of new stone inscriptions; for the Aśokan edicts, for example, Romila Thapar has noted that “there is always anticipation regarding information that a new edict may bring. Even where the text is the same as that of earlier ones, the significance of the location adds to our information on Mauryan history.”¹⁹ But the accretionary process known to be an aspect of archaeological research may be different for textual scholars: is there any compendium of manuscript discoveries that might enable us to ascertain the rate of the recovery of new exemplars? How many South Asian written texts transmitted on paper or palm leaf have become known in the past twenty years compared to the previous one hundred years? In other words, are we significantly increasing the stock of new finds, or have we reached a high rate of redundancy in the discovery of previously unknown texts?

Another question is where the manuscripts come from, what archaeologists would call “provenance.” Aside from the ethical questions of how manuscripts come to visibility (e.g. through looting, private sale, theft from institutions, or by discovery in an archive), there are questions of

where they are housed (in India, or in foreign institutions). Should we focus on such documents thereby legitimizing their removal and purchase? How does it affect interpretation if a text has no surviving copies from its place of origin? One example of a text often cited for understanding social and economic conditions in the Early Historic period is the *Milindapañha* or "Questions of Menander," which is found in the Burmese Buddhist canon but not in the Thai or Sri Lankan versions of the same canon.²⁰ Similarly, the *Arthasāstra* was first recovered as a manuscript in the southern princely state of Mysore and while there have been other manuscripts and commentaries found, the only northern copy comes from the far western state of Gujarat.²¹ Archaeologists may feel distinctly puzzled that this document, which is extensively used in interpreting Aśoka's political mode, is not represented in any surviving copy from the vast Gangetic Plain that was the Mauryan polity's homeland.

Some questions may strike textual scholars as positively banal, but we archaeologists would like to know, for example, what is the credibility of older translations? Many nineteenth- and twentieth-century translations are now in the public domain, and are available through web sites.²² Some of the most prominent documents are updated in book form every few decades, such as the *Arthasāstra* (published by R. Shamasastri in 1915, R.P. Kangle in 1972, and P. Olivelle in 2013) and the *Manusmṛti* (published by G. Bühler in 1886, G. Jha in 1930-31, W. Doniger in 1991, and P. Olivelle in 2009), suggesting that translations become outdated as our own modern languages evolve and as interpretations are strengthened by the inclusion of newly-discovered manuscripts.²³ Since even very good university libraries may not have more recent translations of the less-common texts (and in many cases such translations have never again been made), how can archaeologists use these documents, keeping in mind that new translations might capture the subtleties of ancient intent in ways that provide changed assessments of governance, religious practice and social customs?

The question of translation is related to the fact that archaeologists' goals in using texts differ from the goals of others who study these ancient documents. Philologists are interested in the structure of a text, its transmission and the structure and change of Sanskrit and other grammars, while scholars of religion are interested in ritual prescriptions, liturgical language and the social context of ritual practice. Archaeologists, on the other hand, are interested in what is being transmitted about political authorities as well as about ordinary individuals and the ways in which physical remains such as artifacts and architecture can be used as material referents to recurrent social and religious practices. In fact, archaeological perceptions of relative longevity can provide insights into the way that ancient texts might have been perceived very differently for their original audiences depending on whether the texts were originally made on stone as inscriptions or as oral compositions that were eventually rendered into manuscript form.

The differences between stone inscriptions and manuscript transmissions may provide an important clue about the relative value of those different modes of transmitting "text" and the ways that they can be utilized for the understanding of ancient societies. Instead of considering stone inscriptions as permanent, encompassing records and written traditions as unfixed and changeable, we might suggest that for the purposes of understanding ancient practices, that the equation is quite the opposite: stone inscriptions might have been quite ephemeral in their social impact, while oral traditions -- along with songs and poetry -- may have been the more effective form of transmission.

Stone inscriptions usually could not be moved, and inscriptions that are today quite visible on rocky hillocks or in public locales may have at some points been overgrown by vegetation or obscured by later constructions that have since disappeared. Several of the Aśokan pillar edicts were moved in historical times, leading to questions about their impact in their original locations. Inscriptions clearly also fell out of favor or were rendered obsolete by actions in ancient times; witness, for example, the recovery of the Aśokan edict fragments at Sannati that were only found in 1989 because the stone slab on which they were carved had been re-used as a base for a later temple deity.²⁴

Oral traditions are portable and require no special skills beyond human memory and the capacity to speak, resulting in a rapid sharing of information. The multiplier effect of oral transmission can be compared to stone inscriptions, which were produced one at a time and which required artistic skill and training, as well as a special set of tools. Because so many South Asian texts had their genesis as oral transmissions that were repeated long enough to eventually become written down, we can propose that the ideas and practices of the oral tradition, eventually captured in manuscripts, were of value to many people over long periods of time. In contrast to stone inscriptions whose effects were strictly local, oral transmissions can be used to evaluate whole social structures rather than simply an elite-driven perspective or a singular event preserved in a one-time stone text such as a donative inscription or an imperial proclamation.

The manuscript tradition, which captures orally-transmitted information, also captures a much wider range of subject matter than stone inscriptions.²⁵ Food and animal metaphors are particularly abundant, suggesting that we can interpret these texts as showing ordinary living conditions and everyday events for a wide cross-section of the population. Non-elite agents are also a focus of literary attention; farmers, for example, become an important trope of moral discipline as we see in the *Dhammapada*, a compilation of Buddhist sayings from the early centuries BC that includes proclamations such as: "The farmer channels water to his land...So the wise man directs his mind."²⁶ And in the Saṅgam literature of the Tamil south, dating to the first centuries AD, we encounter lively scenes depicting young girls, sailors, soldiers, rural women, elephant-handlers, and street merchants -- none of whom would have been literate in this era.²⁷

Archaeological Research and Historical Traditions at the Early Historic City of Siśupālgarh

As archaeologists, how can we reconcile general texts that seem to describe a widespread and long-lived social milieu with point-specific inscriptions that appear to provide precise local descriptions but that may not have had as much social relevance over the long term? These questions are addressed below with reference to the archaeological site of Siśupālgarh, a city of the Early Historic period in eastern India. Occupied throughout the Early Historic period, the site was first investigated by Prof. B.B. Lal in 1948 and has been the subject of renewed research involving systematic surface survey and collection, geophysical survey and excavations.²⁸

The archaeological site of Siśupālgarh measures 130 hectares in size and is formally delineated by a rampart-and-moat configuration measuring up to 9 metres in height and marked by eight monumental gateways. In addition to the ramparts, the site also contains numerous indicators of labor investment in large-scale architecture such as stone columns and stone-lined reservoirs concentrated

at the center of the site. Siśupālgarh is particularly noteworthy because it is the most regular of the Early Historic walled cities, with a perimeter and gateways that suggest a sustained effort of planning and of execution (Pl. 43.1). It is also a particularly valuable site for understanding Early Historic urbanism because it was depopulated by the mid-first millennium AD and with the exception of a few artifacts from the early medieval period (c. 9th century AD), was not substantially reoccupied. This means that Early Historic deposits are uppermost and available for both surface and subsurface investigation.

The robust and extensive archaeological record at Siśupālgarh is complemented by a landscape that includes Buddhist and Jain sites in the immediate vicinity along with two famous stone inscriptions. One inscription is located at Dhauli Hill three kilometres away (Pl. 43.2). This inscription is part of the corpus of major rock edicts attributed to the third-century BC Mauryan ruler Aśoka, with a special section of text that appears only in eastern India and at Sannati in the south.²⁹ As in the case of many other Aśokan inscriptions, the writing at Dhauli is not particularly prominent on the hillside and is placed on a large boulder halfway to the top of the hill. The most distinctive feature of the boulder is actually the elephant carved on the top. The inscription is written in *Prākṛit*, and principally concerns government and administration. Interspersed with comments about the fatherly duty of a king, Aśoka commands that “the city magistrates should at all times see to it that men are never imprisoned or tortured without good reason” and proposes to send out an officer on tour every five years to be sure that his directives are implemented.³⁰

The other inscription in the vicinity of Siśupālgarh is the Hathigumpha inscription of Kharavela at the Udayagiri/ Khandagiri cave complex on hills located 9 kilometres to the northwest (Pl. 43.3). Like the Aśokan edict at Dhauli, the Hathigumpha cave inscription is also a political document, consisting of an autobiographical description of the reign of King Kharavela as a year-by-year account of the ruler’s actions. It is written in Sanskrit, and dates to the second half of the first century BC.³¹ The inscription is located on the prominent face of a hill covered with several dozen human-made caves that served as a Jain religious retreat during the rainy season. In this text, there are numerous references to a city, which is generally taken to be the archaeological site of Siśupālgarh given its proximity to the inscription site.

A comparative assessment of these two inscriptions indicates that they while they look the same to us now as “texts”, they may have had very different impacts on the inhabitants of the urban center of Siśupālgarh. The inscription at Dhauli is a major component of the Aśoka’s corpus and probably located at the very spot of the Kalinga War, but the long-term impact of those phenomena are unknown. Siśupālgarh was occupied by the 6th century BC with a rampart that was constructed shortly after the first occupation, meaning that it was a thriving city long before the historical time frame of Aśoka’s invasion.³² Archaeological deposits recovered through deep soundings at the site show a continuous occupation, and there is no indication of disruption as might have been anticipated by the war that is referenced in the edict.

How the inhabitants might have received the emplacement of the Aśokan edict could be interpreted on the basis of its location. Rather than being fixed within the urban settlement, the lengthy

edict was placed in a more neutral location away from the population center, a move that might be viewed as conciliatory or suggestive rather than commanding.³³ Aśoka himself may have recognized the potential for his words to have been received with indifference, as he notes in the edict that it was to be read aloud on regular occasions, "even to a single person."³⁴ Although the Dhauli area with its Buddhist affiliations was likely to have maintained some importance for the local population, its distance from the urban center and lack of obvious Buddhist or other religious architectural investments might have resulted in the site being visited only occasionally by the ancient residents of Sisupalgarh.³⁵

By contrast, the Hathigumpha inscription, if it is correctly dated to the later part of the first century BC, would capture the events occurring at Siśupālgarh's most populous and prosperous phase, and from the perspective of a vigorous local leader. Kharavela placed his inscription at the Jain site of Udayagiri, which was further away from the urban center but which must have had more public visibility than the Buddhist site of Dhauli given its greater embellishments and large number of carved caves. This may signal that by the first century BC, two centuries after Aśoka, Buddhist doctrine may not have generated the same level of attention and labor investment in this region of eastern India.³⁶ At Dhauli, the Aśokan edict was essentially a record of a past war that may have constituted a painful reminder that was perhaps best ignored. By contrast, the Hathigumpha inscription at Udayagiri served as an celebratory explanation of the urban environment that the inhabitants of Sisupalgarh experienced every day.

The interpretation of the two inscriptions also gives us an opportunity to compare real events attributed to Kharavela with programmatic statements offered in the Aśokan edict. Kharavela notes that in his years of rule he raised armies and fought wars, sponsored festivals and irrigation works, and built and repaired a number of structures. He shows himself to be an able cultivator of public opinion, for in the first year of his reign he "caused to be repaired the gate, rampart and structures of the fort of Kalinganagari, which had been damaged by storm, and caused to be built flight of steps for the cool tanks [reservoirs] and laid out all gardens at the cost of thirty-five hundred thousand (coins) and thus pleased all his subjects."³⁷ Edifices for his own use came later, and it was only in the ninth year of his reign that he records the construction of the royal residence, the "Great Victory Palace".³⁸

Now let us place the two political inscriptions of Dhauli and the Hathigumpha cave in a larger documentary context. Stone inscriptions had a longevity simply because of the material on which they were inscribed, but they were relatively rare in the Early Historic period. In fact, we should ask ourselves why inscriptions are so rare, given their apparent political utility: once the concept of writing had been perfected, the technique should have been widely utilized. Our own modern sensibilities reflect an expectation of a highly inscribed universe in which there is writing nearly everywhere around us in the form of signboards, memorial plaques, instructions and advertisements. We also experience the ways in which writing democratizes access to what might otherwise be privileged information (such as legal documents or sacred texts). However, we might consider whether writing, like any other new technology introduced for the first time, had its detractors.³⁹ For the denizens of

the Early Historic period, writing may have been regarded as a highly circumstantial or even suspect medium of communication, and even a factor that might have served to distinguish the emergent religious traditions of Buddhism and Jainism compared to the established Vedic ritual traditions that continued to be disseminated orally.⁴⁰

In addition to ritual pronouncements, there were many other types of information that were transmitted orally and that eventually became part of the manuscript tradition, including medical treatises, grammatical treatises, plays and poems. Such texts started as spoken words and/or were transmitted via perishable materials, and their contents were more likely to have permeated the living context of daily life in the form of prayers, songs, recipes, proverbs and stories. The physical preservation of those texts occurred long after they had already entered into the realm of lived consciousness through repetition and frequent public performance, suggesting that their survival as oral documents and even as written copies occurred only because they retained resonance to subsequent generations who elected to reaffirm their value through both written and oral repetition.

The widespread distribution of orally-transmitted sayings paralleled the widespread distribution of shared ideals about style and form as seen in archaeological remains. The Early Historic period is marked by the development of physically distinctive architecture and artifacts distributed through extensive trading activities. Religious architecture in the form of stupas, chaitya halls and monasteries not only served to characterize Buddhist activities but were also adopted into other religious traditions such as Jainism. By the first century BC, Buddhist iconography not only included the standardized representation of the Buddha himself in human form, but also a decorative iconography of human and geometric forms that was so similar at different sites that it has been credited to the presence of artisans who moved from place to place.⁴¹ Major religious sites such as Bharhut, Sanchi, Bodh Gaya and Amaravati were separated by hundreds of kilometres, but the sites themselves illustrate through their similarities that both artisans and patrons desired to create a familiar setting for shared religious ideals. The relative ease of transport, and the adoption of a shared material culture in everyday life, is also indicated by the widespread use of the same types of daily-use goods such as serving vessels and commonly-used ornaments such as beads in habitation sites throughout the subcontinent.

Applied specifically to the realm of eastern India, we can see the many ways in which the inhabitants of the Siśupālgarh region would have been familiar with the iconography, material culture and literary traditions that were circulating throughout the Indian subcontinent. At the cave site of Udayagiri there are sculptural motifs of human figures identical to those found elsewhere; at Dhauli there is a sculpted elephant on the top of the Aśokan edict that called to mind other subcontinental depictions of elephants ranging from coinage to pillar capitals to the decorations of caves.⁴² Sculptural motifs of animals as well as of people, whether carved by traveling artisans or by local artisans, constitute evidence of an emplacement of widespread ideals in the physical landscape of the Odishan countryside.⁴³ Portable artifacts, indicative of both long-distance exchange and local manufacturing, also demonstrate many similarities to artifacts found elsewhere. Pottery found throughout the eastern Indian coastal zone (such as “knobbed” ware and Rouletted Ware) and ornaments in the form of terracotta bangles, earspools and pendants recalled the same motifs seen in other parts of India.⁴⁴

At Siśupālgarh, a materialization of Early Historic ideals about social organization are seen in both architecture and in the urban configuration. B.B. Lal himself noted that the layout of the settlement recalled the configurations for the ideal city that can be found in the historical text known as the *Arthaśāstra*. It is important to recall his statement about the applicability of a textual source for the understanding of archaeological remains: "I have no hesitation in conceding that what the *Arthaśāstra* states is by and large 'normative', that is to say it gives the layout of a settlement as it ought to be. At the same time, it would be wrong to assume that most of this is imaginary or without foundation".⁴⁵ Lal's commentary is an essential insight on the way in which manuscript traditions capture important social ideals even if the configuration was subject to the idiosyncrasies of living community contexts. The manifestation of the ideals outlined in works such as the *Arthaśāstra* would have required significant amounts of labor coordination as well as the realities of engineering expertise and the need for consensus in the implementation of infrastructure projects of this scale.

Normative and prescriptive texts such as the *Arthaśāstra* served not only as a blueprint for future actions but also as an explanation of cultural practices that already existed. The articulation of cartographic principles for city layout would have seemed quite logical in a time when other systems of order were circulating, including the organizational expectations for language as set forth in Pāṇini's *Grammar* and the organizational expectations for social interactions in the *Manusmṛti*. The materialization of social ideals transmitted in oral form indicates not only that a particular ideology existed, but that it was the basis for investments of work carried out by many hundreds of people in the course of creating a physical reality.⁴⁶

In thinking about the norms and practices that are encompassed in the material culture recovered by archaeologists, we should keep in mind the entire range of texts beyond political documents and ritual texts. Indeed, it is in poetry that we see the most evocative links between literary compositions and the living context of ancient cities. We can turn to the Sangam corpus of the Tamil south to provide us a view of an Early Historic city that is tangibly alive, as seen in this excerpt from the *Perumpanattrupadai*:

Strong chariots run and make ruts in the streets.

There is an army strong, invincible

And famous; markets where the city folk

That densely live do always buy and sell;

And gates not shut against poor mendicants

Who need no patron else. The city shines

Like fair seed vessels of the lotus...⁴⁷

At Siśupālgarh, B.B. Lal's excavations of 1948 uncovered a street at Siśupālgarh that did have ruts in it from wheeled vehicles! Like the songs and poems that were transmitted time and again over centuries, the ruts reveal the passage of not one occasional traveler, but the continued passage of hundreds of carts and thousands of people in a daily materialization of the "truth" of an ancient text.

Conclusion

Archaeologists seek to reconstruct human behavioral systems from the materials left behind by ancient peoples, ranging from distinctive monumental architecture to the humblest fragmentary potsherd. When textual records also exist, words from the ancient past enliven and enrich our understanding of how societies functioned. However, ancient peoples' perception of those words may have varied considerably based on the subject matter and manner of presentation. To our eyes now all of these "texts" appear more or less equal because they are rendered into words on a printed book page. However, the irony is that words that appear ephemeral, such as those preserved through manuscript traditions, may actually have had a longer-lived presence in cultural terms precisely because they survived in many copies and in many places for a long time. This ephemeral longevity should be contrasted with point-specific, one-time inscriptions that loom large in the archaeological imagination but may have had only fleeting relevance to their contemporary viewers.

Giving us the illusion of permanence, the impact of a stone inscription may actually have been less durable than that of the spoken word. Oral traditions could be understood by all within hearing distance, and were repeated again and again. By contrast, especially in an era of very restricted literacy, the impact of a stone inscription ended when there was no one left who could – or cared to – read it out loud. In the case of both the Aśokan edict at Dhauli and the Hathigumpha inscription at Udayagiri, they are located away from the nearest population centers in special-purpose locations. Each inscription is at the midpoint of the hillside, as though the carvers intended them to be an initial waypoint or introduction to the physical realms that the viewers would have experienced more fully at the apex of each hill or in the broader landscape. At Dhauli, an ancient stupa or other structure might have been the end-goal of pilgrimage; at Udayagiri, the outline of a chaitya on the pinnacle of the hill provided the ultimate goal of community participation.

Archaeologists and scholars of ancient literature may seem to address different sources of information, but both groups are focused on the repeated, daily actions of ordinary people in ways that enable us to ask how socially-approved concepts were rendered into lived experiences. The urban configurations of the ancient past were encapsulated in the fluidity of texts that provide historical details and moral precepts, but those social configurations were also materialized in ordinary goods such as bricks, pottery, ornaments, and tools. And for the purposes of cultural interpretation based on material remains, a literary tradition from several hundreds of kilometres away may describe a city such as *Sisūpālgarh* more thoroughly than an edict found within walking distance. Mutual appreciation of the benefits and challenges of all types of material and literary will enable us to collectively work towards the goal of achieving "results on a broader basis, encompassing a wider panorama of both time and space" that constitute the truth of the ancient past.⁴⁸

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2. B.B. Lal, *ibid.*, p. 5.
3. Michael Shanks, "Photography and Archaeology" Brian Leigh Molyneaux edited *The Cultural Life of Images: Visual Representation in Archaeology*. Routledge, London, 1997, pp 73-107.
4. Gregory L. Possehl and Michael Witzel, "Vedic" in Peter N. Peregrine and Melvin Ember edited *Encyclopedia of Prehistory Vol. 8, South and Southwest Asia*, Kluwer, New York, 2002, pp. 391-397.
5. Namita Sugandhi, "Context, Content, and Composition: Questions of Intended Meaning and the Asokan Edicts" *Asian Perspectives* vol. 42 No 2 (2003), pp. 224-246; Harry Falk, *Aśokan Sites and Artefacts: A Source-Book with Bibliography*. Von Zabern, Mainz, 2006.
6. Compare the discussion in Romila Thapar's original 1961 publication of *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* with the revised edition published in 1997 and with F.R. Allchin and K.R. Norman "Guide to the Aśokan inscriptions" *South Asian Studies* 1 (1985), pp. 43-50. For suggestions about where new inscriptions might be found, see Thomas W. Gillespie, Monica L. Smith, Scott Barron, Kanika Kalra and Corey Rovzar, "Predictive Modeling for Archaeological Sites: Ashokan Edicts from the Indian Subcontinent" *Current Science* vol. 110 No 10 (2016), pp. 1916-1921; Monica L. Smith, Thomas W. Gillespie, Scott Barron, and Kanika Kalra, "Finding History: The Locational Geography of Ashokan Inscriptions in the Indian Subcontinent" *Antiquity* 90 (2016), pp. 376-392.
7. Patrick Olivelle, "Aśoka's Inscriptions as Text and Ideology" In Patrick Olivelle, Janice Leoshko, and Himanshu Prabha Ray edited *Reimagining Aśoka: Memory and History*, University Press, New Delhi (2012), pp. 157-183.
8. Namita Sugandhi, *op. cit.*, p. 235, has suggested that for the Aśokan edicts, early British translations provide nuances of meaning that may overemphasize or underemphasize elements of political control or territorial command.
9. Harry Falk "The Diverse Degrees of Authenticity of Aśokan Texts" Patrick Olivelle edited *Aśoka in History and Historical Memory*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi (2009), pp. 5-17.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
11. K. Krishnamoorthy ("Classical Sanskrit Literature: A Historical Survey" T.R.S. Sharma edited *Ancient Indian Literature: An Anthology Volume 2: Classical Sanskrit, Prakrit and Apabhramsa*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 2000, p. 56) suggests that the Sanskrit inscriptions became common starting in the second century A.D.
12. For example, Patrick Olivelle (*Pancatantra: The Book of India's Folk Wisdom*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997, p. xiii) notes that the *Pancatantra*, one of the most long-lived works, is a collection of tales that is also known as the *Tantrākhyāyikā*, *Pancakhyānaka* [or *Pancakhyāna*], and *Tantropakhyāna*.
13. Lewis Lancaster, "Buddhist Literature: Its Canons, Scribes, and Editors" Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty edited *The Critical Study of Sacred Texts*, Graduate Theological Union, University of California, Berkeley, 1979, p. 228; see also Patrick Olivelle, Structure and Composition of the Manava Dharmśāstra, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 30 (2002), pp. 535-574.

14. This point is raised by virtually every translator and interpreter of South Asian texts; see, for example, Stanley Rice, *Ancient Indian Fables and Stories: Being a Selection from the Panchatantra*, E.P. Dutton, New York 1924; Brian Brown, editor, *The Wisdom of the Hindus*, Garden City Publishing, New York, 1938 p. 19; Thomas Byrom, *The Dhammapada: The Sayings of the Buddha*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1976, p. xiii; Kumkum Roy, "The Vedic Age" In *Ancient India*, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1995 p. 14; Arshia Sattar, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Valmiki*, New Delhi: Penguin, 1996, p. ii; Nalini Sadhale, *Krishī-Parashara*, Asian Agri-History Foundation, Secunderabad, 1999; C.T.M. Kotraiah, *King, Court and Capital: An Anthology of Kannada Literary Sources from the Vijayanagara Period*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2003, p. xiv; Romila Thapar, *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*, London: Allen Lane, 2002, pp. xxiii-iv; Robert D. DeCaroli, *Haunting the Buddha: Indian Popular Religions and the Formation of Buddhism*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2004, pp. 35-37.
15. Sattar, op. cit., p. ii.
16. Lancaster, op. cit., p. 215.
17. As Olivelle, 1997 op. cit., p. ix has observed for the *Panchatantra*.
18. In a review article, Wendy Doniger ("Review of Upanisads: The World's Classics" *Journal of Asian Studies* 56 No. 3 [1997], pp 829-831) noted that "Nearly two hundred and fifty texts call themselves Upanisads (there is even an "Allah Upanisad" and a "Christopanisad"), several Southern medieval works mention a hundred and eight, and fifty were translated into Persian in 1656; Paul Deussen translated sixty into German (1897). The English translations continued to narrow the field: K. Narayanasvami Aiyar did thirty (1914), Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan sixty (1953), while Robert Ernest Hume actually called his text, which has become the standard, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949)."
19. Thapar op. cit., 2002, p. 179.
20. Perenchio, Martin, *Guide to the Tipitaka*, White Lotus, Bangkok, 1993, p. xv.
21. Thomas R. Trautmann, *Kautilya and the Arthaśāstra: A Statistical Investigation of the Authorship and Evolution of the Text*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1971, p. 1.
22. e.g., www.sacred-texts.com.
23. It is particularly interesting to note that compared to some Indian sources such as the *Arthaśāstra* and the *Manusmṛti* that have been served with updated translations, sources for Indian history that are external to the subcontinent and that still wield influence have not been updated. Thomas Trautman and Carla M. Sinopoli (op. cit., p. 204) note that the ancient Greek account known as the *Indica* by the fourth century BC writer Megasthenes, which was already truncated because no direct manuscript has been found and the work is primarily reported in excerpts by later writers such as Arrian, has translations from 1846 and 1860 that are still in use.
24. Falk, op. cit., p. 130; see also K.R. Norman, "Aśokan Inscriptions from Sannati" *South Asian Studies* 7 (1991), pp. 101-110.
25. DeCaroli, op. cit., 2004.
26. Byrom, op. cit., p. 31.
27. J.V. Chelliah, J.V., *Pattupattu: Ten Tamil Idylls*, Tamil University, Thanjavur, 1985.
28. B.B. Lal, Siśupālgarh 1948: An Early Historical Fort in Eastern India. *Ancient India* 5 (1949), pp. 62-105; Lal, op. cit. 1991; Monica L. Smith, "Archaeological research at Siśupālgarh, an Early Historic city in Eastern India" Ute Franke-Vogt and Hans-Joachim Weisshaar edited *South Asian Archaeology 2003*, Linden Soft, Aachen, 2005, pp. 291-300; Rabindra Kumar Mohanty and Monica L. Smith, *Excavations at Siśupālgarh*, Indian Archaeological Society, New Delhi, 2008; Rabindra Kumar Mohanty, Monica L. Smith and Tilok Thakuria, Excavations at Siśupālgarh 2009: The Northern Gateway and Activity Areas Outside the Rampart, *Man and Environment* vol. 38 No 1, pp. 55-65; Monica L. Smith and Rabindra Kumar Mohanty, "Archaeology at Siśupālgarh: The Chronology of an Early Historic Urban

- Centre in Eastern India" Vincent Lefèvre, Aurore Didier, and Benjamin Mutin edited *South Asian Archaeology and Art 2012, volume 2*, Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2017, pp. 683-695.
29. Falk, op. cit. 2006; Norman op. cit. 1991, p. 102.
 30. Thapar, op. cit. 1997, p. 258.
 31. N.K. Sahu, *Kharavela*, Government of India Textbook Press, Bhubaneswar, 1984, p. 1. The inscription is dated to the first century BC (*Ibid*) or the late second to early first century BC (Richard Salomon "Aśoka and the 'Epigraphic Habit' in India" Patrick Olivelle edited *Aśoka in History and Historical Memory*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 2009, p. 50).
 32. Lal's original assessment of the beginning of occupation at Siśupālgarh was suggested as 300 BC on the basis of comparative artifact chronology (Lal op. cit. 1949, p. 72) as radiocarbon dating had not yet been developed at the time. His later writings encouraged a revision of the dates, and he subsequently suggested on the revised general dates for black-and-red ware that the dates of Sisupalgarh's earliest occupation could be revised at least to the 4-5th centuries BC (Lal, op. cit. 1991, p. 14), a factor that was confirmed by the recent suite of radiocarbon dates (Smith and Mohanty op. cit. 2017).
 33. Sugandhi, op. cit., p. 233, has noted that Aśokan edicts at southern Indian sites also are sometimes located away from population centers.
 34. Thapar, op. cit. 1997, p. 258.
 35. One caution, however, is that Buddhist activities at Dhauli might have been encoded into ephemeral vestiges, such as temporary pilgrimage shelters that did not leave a durable trace, or that constructions originally existed in more durable architecture that has subsequently disappeared. There is also a possibility that some ancient architecture lay at the apex of the hill, where a modern Japanese-designed stupa now stands.
 36. Another possibility is that the more active zone of Buddhist practice was a little farther away, for example at the recently excavated and very prominent Buddhist site of Aragarh located 18 kilometres to the southwest along the Daya River from Siśupālgarh, investigated by Dr. Sunil Kumar Patnaik of the Odishan Institute of Maritime & South East Asian Studies, Bhubaneswar.
 37. Sahu, p. 334.
 38. *Ibid*, p. 340.
 39. Richard Salomon (*Indian Epigraphy: A Guide to the Study of Inscriptions in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and the Other Indo-Aryan Languages*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1998, p. 7) suggests that "From Vedic times on, and even to the present day in some cultural contexts, it is oral rather than written learning that has always been esteemed in India as true knowledge, an attitude reflected in such proverbs as *pustakasthā tuyā vidyā parahastagaraṃ dhanam*, 'Knowledge in a book [is like] money in someone else's hand'".
 40. Writing as a new technology might have been introduced or utilized only sporadically, just as figural sculpture was "invented" and developed within the social context of the Early Historic period. The first large-scale sculptures in the Indian subcontinent date to the 3rd-2nd centuries BC, a time that was coincident with the development of the first extant Buddhist monastic structures (Robert DeCaroli, "From the Living Rock: Understanding Figural Representation in Early South Asia" Jan Mrázek and Morgan Pitelka edited *What's the Use of Art? Asian Visual and Material Culture in Context*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 2008, pp. 21-45; see also Janice Leoshko, "Assessing Evidence of Aśokan-Period Art" Patrick Olivelle edited *Aśoka in History and Historical Memory*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 2009, pp. 53-93). The emergence of sculpture along with the first substantial examples of writing suggests that there were numerous social changes that were being materially encoded simultaneously into both images and text. Richard Salomon (*op. cit.*) suggests that the concept of making stone inscriptions was not immediately taken up, resulting in a relative paucity of inscriptions other than those of Aśoka in the early part of the Early Historic period. The specific fate of Brāhmī script, compared to the longevity of Sanskrit, further suggests that the initial

tie-up of Brāhmī to the Aśokan edicts, and by extension, to Buddhism in general, was not sufficient to guarantee its long-term success as a script. Falk (2009, *op. cit.*, p. 8), notes that by the time of the Chinese pilgrims Faxian (early 5th century AD) and Xuanzang (7th century AD) and despite an ongoing investment in Buddhism in the subcontinent, people were no longer able to read Aśokan Brāhmī. By contrast, Sanskrit has been in continual use through to modern times.

41. For a discussion of the development of the Buddha and other deities rendered into sculpture, see Robert DeCaroli, *Image Problems: The Origin and Development of the Buddha's Image in Early South Asia*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2015; for the discussion of artisans, see Alex Wayman and Elizabeth Rosen, "The Rise of Mahayana Buddhism and Inscriptional Evidence at Nagarjunakonda" *Indian Journal of Buddhist Studies*, vol. 2, No 1 (1990) pp. 49-65.
42. Elephants are seen among early sculptural representations in the subcontinent, for example, the facade of the Lomas Rishi cave at Barabar (Owen C. Kail, *Buddhist Cave Temples of India*, Taraporevala, Bombay, 1975) and on the Mauryan-period capital at Sankasya (Leoshko, *op. cit.*, pp. 58, 76).
43. Thapar *op. cit.* 1997, p. 268 has suggested that the elephant at Dhauli was carved by local artisans.
44. Sikhasree Ray, *Monuments of Eastern Odisha: A Cultural Study (1st c. BC to 10th c. AD)*. Ph.D. Thesis, Department of Archaeology, Deccan College, Pune, 2014.
45. Lal *op. cit.*, 1991, p. 18.
46. "Copying" can be considered a creative social activity because of the way that it allows individuals to participate in prevailing styles; see Monica L. Smith, "The Concept of Copies: An Archaeological View of the Terracotta Ornaments from Siśupālgarh, India. *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* vol. 22 No 1, pp. 3-43.
47. Chelliah, *op. cit.*, p. 129.
48. Lal *op. cit.*, 1991, p. 1.