

THE TRANSFORMATION OF OBJECTS INTO  
ARTIFACTS, ANTIQUITIES, AND ART IN  
NINETEENTH-CENTURY INDIA

**T**HIS CHAPTER explores how things are fabricated and how they are transformed into objects that have value and meaning. The context is India and Great Britain in the nineteenth century. An object, be it a fired piece of clay, a bone, paper with colors applied to it, a lump of metal shaped into a sharp point, a shiny stone which is polished, a feather, everything that we think of as existing in nature, can be transformed through human labor into a product which has a meaning, use, and value.

A pot shard dug up and placed in a museum with a label identifying and dating it becomes a specimen along with thousands of others, which establish, for the archaeologist, a history. A bone found in a particular geological formation becomes a fossil for a palaeontologist to read as part of an evolutionary sequence. For someone else this bone ground up becomes an aphrodisiac. The paper covered by paint is a god; in another time and place, it is a work of art. A piece of cloth fabricated for presentation marking the alliance between two families through a marriage becomes a bedspread. A piece of metal shaped and sharpened and used as a weapon by a great warrior becomes for his descendants an emblem of his power, and is carefully stored away in an armory, to be brought out in times of trouble to rally a failing army. In the hands of his enemies, it becomes a trophy. A piece of cloth worn by a religious leader at his moment of death has magical powers and for generations is revered as a relic.

The nominal subject of this volume (patronage in Indian culture) raises another set of questions about the production and meaning of objects, by shifting the focus from the fabricators of objects to those who commission, pay for, protect, support, and utilize the results of the labor and thought of the producers. In the language of the OED, a patron is "one who supports or protects, an institution, a cause, art or undertaking," and patronage, the OED goes on to define in its "commercial or colloquial usage," is "financial support given by customers in making use of anything established, opened or offered for the use of the public."

#### TRANSFORMATION OF OBJECTS

The examples of this usage given in the OED all date from the nineteenth century. In this chapter I will explore patronage in an extended sense, as a relationship located in a political context, in which the British increasingly impose on Indians their own conception of value. The objects through which this relationship was constructed were found, discovered; collected, and classified as part of a larger European project to decipher *the* history of India.

It was the British who, in the nineteenth century, defined in an authoritative and effective fashion how the value and meaning of the objects produced or found in India were determined. It was the patrons who created a system of classification which determined what was valuable, that which would be preserved as monuments of the past, that which was collected and placed in museums, that which could be bought and sold, that which would be taken from India as mementoes and souvenirs of their own relationship to India and Indians. The foreigners increasingly established markets which set the price of objects. By and large, until the early twentieth century, Indians were bystanders to discussions and polemics which established meaning and value for the Europeans. Even when increasing numbers of Indians entered into the discussion, the terms of the discourse and the agenda were set by European purposes and intentions.<sup>1</sup>

From the inception of direct trading relations between Great Britain and India in the early seventeenth century, India was looked upon as the source of commodities, the sale of which in Europe and Asia would produce profits for the owners and employees of the East India Company. Textiles in bulk and value came to be the primary Indian product imported and sold by the Company in Europe. Hence it was through these textiles that India was primarily known to the consuming classes in Britain and western Europe. The impact of Indian cloth was to play a major role in creating what Chandra Mukherji terms "modern materialism," and the development of industrial capitalism, in the efforts of eighteenth-century British entrepreneurs to find technological means by which British labor could organize to compete with Indian-made textiles. One gets a sense of how deeply embedded Indian goods are in Anglo-American culture through our language, in which so many terms relating to cloth have their origin in India.<sup>2</sup> In addition to those Indian products which were essentially seen as utilitarian goods, there was scattered interest in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in items thought of as curios and preciosities, or what today might be thought of as "collectibles." These include odd paintings, both by Indians and Lusho-Indians, inlaid ivory chests and other items of furniture, jewelry and precious stones, swords and weapons to be used as decorative items.<sup>3</sup>

## European Interpretative Strategies for "Knowing" India: 1600-1750

The major interpretative strategy by which India was to become known to Europeans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was through a construction of a history for India. India was seen by Europeans not only as exotic and bizarre but as a kind of living museum of the European past. In India could be found "all the characters who are found in the Bible" and the "books which tell of the Jews and other ancient nation" The religion of the Gentoos was described as having been established at the time of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, and preserved by Noah; or the religion of "the seed of those who revolted against Moses" and the worshipers of the "molten calf."<sup>5</sup> The Brahmans were Levites or Nazarites; Jains, Rehabites. Indians were, for some Europeans, the direct descendants of one of the lost ten tribes, for others the manners and customs of Indians derived from the ancient Egyptians who were the descendants of Ham, the son of Noah.

The Bible and the medieval patristic literature offered another interpretation of the culture and religions of India for the European travelers: this was the home of traditional enemies of Christianity, Satan and his devils. One of the earliest of the British travelers in India knew what the religion of the Gentoos was all about.

But above all, their horrid Idolatry to Pagods (or Images of deformed devils) is most observable: Placed in Chappels most commonly built under the Bannyan Trees. A tree of such repute amongst 'em, that they hold it impiety to abuse it, either in breaking a branch or otherwise, but contrarily adorne it with Streamers of silk and ribbons of all colours. The Pagods are of sundry sorts and resemblances, in such shape as Satan visibly appears unto them: ugly faced, long black haire, gogl'd eyes, wide mouth, a forked beard, homes v and stradhlg, mishapen and horrible, after the old filthy forme of Pan and Priapus.<sup>6</sup>

To have found the devil and Satan in India was not strange and unusual to the Europeans, as they knew they were there all along. Recent scholarship has tended to stress that European accounts of the peoples of the New World, Africa, and Asia, dwelt less on the strangeness of the "other" but rather on their familiarity. The "exotics," writes Michael Ryan, could be fitted into a familiar web of discourse, as they were after all heathens and pagans, and "no matter how bizarre and offbeat he appeared the unbaptised exotic was just that—a heathen."<sup>7</sup> When traveling in a strange land, even meeting an old enemy, the devil, is something of a comfort.

#### TRANSFORMATION OF OBJECTS

Europeans knew the world through its signs and correspondences to things known. The exploration of the terrestrial world was being carried out at the same time that Europeans were exploring their own origins in the pagan past of Greece and Rome. Hence another way of knowing Indians arose through looking for conformities between the living exotics of India and their ancient counterparts in Egypt, Greece, and Rome. The exotic and the antique were one and the same.<sup>8</sup> Brahmans, yogis, and sadhus were "gymnosophists," followers of creators of the Pythagorean ideas about the transmigration of souls. These holy men in their benign mode were naked philosophers who in some medieval European traditions were the symbols of natural goodness "who embodied the possibility of salvation without revelation . . . outside the established Church."<sup>9</sup> The Brahmans and yogis as "good" were to eventually lose out to another reading, and become the perpetuators of superstitions, which they created and manipulated to mystify and keep subordinated the rest of the Hindu population of India. The yogi, the sannyasi, the fakir, the sadhu had by the eighteenth century been converted into living devils and the followers of all that was lascivious and degenerate in Greek and Roman religion, the worship of Pan and Priapus.

The literature on India of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries varies in its content but it established an enduring structural relationship between India and the West: Europe was progressive and changing, India static. Here could be found a kind of living fossil bed of the European past, a museum which was to provide Europeans for the next two hundred years a vast field on which to impose their own visions of history. India was found to be the land of oriental despotism, with its cycles of strong but lawless rules, whose inability to create a political order based on anything but unbridled power led inevitably to its own destruction in a war of all against all, leading to anarchy and chaos.

The British, in their construction of the history of India, came into the Indie world at one of its periods of inevitable decay and degeneration into chaos. Through the development of their version of rational despotism, they were able to find and maintain a stable basis for ordering Indian society. Fortunately it turned out that there were enduring and unchanging institutions in India at the local level. The traditional Indian state was epiphenominal and it was found to have no political order, rather India turned out to be a land of unchanging institutions based on family, caste, and the village community. The "discovery" of the relationship between the classical languages of Europe, Latin, and Greek, and of Indian Sanskrit, led to refinement of comparative method. This enabled the Europeans to provide India with a macrohistory organized into developmental stages. Certain universal features were constructed as markers of progress; the presence or absence of communal or private

property, of the centralized state and kingship, of pastoralism or settled agriculture, became markers of progress or the lack thereof.

The British found that some parts of India were still at the feudal stage of development. Indian modes of production were at a pre-industrial stage, whose products could be taken to represent what Europe had lost through industrialization.

India was to be provided with a linear history following a nineteenth-century positivist historiography as well. Ruins could be dated, inscriptions made to reveal king lists, texts could be converted into sources for the study of the past. Each phase of the European effort to unlock the secret of the Indian past called for more and more collecting, more and more systems of classification, more and more building of repositories for the study of the past and the representation of the European history of India to Indians as well as themselves.

### The State and the Surveying of the Indian Past

The capture of Seringapatam in 1799 and the final defeat of Tipu Sultan begins the direct involvement of the Company's government in a systematic effort to explore and document India's past. The Company now controlled most of India south of the Vindhya mountains, completing a military and diplomatic conquest begun fifty years earlier. This victory, combined with Lord Lake's entry into Delhi in 1803, ended whatever doubts there were that the British were now the conquerors of India and had fulfilled Alexander's historical ambitions. The death of Tipu, the arch villain in the emergent British hagiography of India, provided the necessary counterpoint to construction of the British as valorous, virtuous, and above all, triumphant conquerors.

The Company had a governor-general, Lord Wellesley, who matched the times. Unlike the owners and managers of the Company, who rarely looked beyond the ledger sheets, Wellesley had an imperial vision of the future of India. His first move was to establish a college in Calcutta, where the young employees of the Company who were no longer just "agents of a commercial concern" were to be trained "as ministers and officers of a powerful sovereign."<sup>10</sup> In addition Wellesley recognized the need for the systematic collection of information about the natural resources, the arts and manufactures, and the social and economic conditions of the inhabitants of the newly acquired territories of south India. To this end Wellesley established several surveys, the model of which can be seen in John Sinclair's statistical surveys of the highlands of Scotland.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the term "statis-

#### TRANSFORMATION OF OBJECTS

tical" did not imply as it does today the collection, aggregation, and presentation of numerical data, rather it implied collection of information thought necessary and useful to the state. Since the time of William Camden (1551-1623) information had been collected and published about current conditions, history, and antiquities of various localities in Great Britain. Central to this endeavor was the location and description of old buildings, ruins, sites of ancient settlements, collection of family histories and genealogies, as well as the description of local customs and laws, thought to be antique or unusual.

Wellesley established three separate surveys of the Mysore territories, one under the direction of colonel Colin Mackenzie, which was to embrace "two great leading objects, Mathematical and Physical."<sup>11</sup> Another was under the direction of Francis Buchanan (Hamilton), who was instructed by Wellesley that the primary object of his enquiries "should be the agriculture of the country," and Benjamin Heyne, who under Mackenzie's direction was to collect botanical and geological specimens.<sup>12</sup>

Little is known of the first twenty-eight years of Mackenzie's life. He was born and grew up in Stornoway on the Island of Lewis in the Hebrides, his father a merchant, and the family had connections with the owners of the island, the Seaforths. He had, early on, shown great talent in mathematics, and assisted Lord Napier of Merchiston in the writing of a biography of his ancestor John Napier, the inventor of English logarithms. It would appear it was in connection with an interest Merchiston had in Hindu mathematics that an appointment in the Madras Engineers was obtained for Mackenzie in 1783.<sup>13</sup>

For a short while after his arrival in India in 1782, Mackenzie worked with Lord Merchiston's daughter in Madurai, along with several brah-mans employed to collect materials on Hindu mathematics. Soon, however, his official duties prevented his pursuing his interests in "collecting observations and notices of Hindoo manners geography and history." Mackenzie's military duties took him to most of the provinces south of the Kistna river, but frequent transfers, and the demands of his military profession, prevented him from learning any of the "native languages." Any opportunity for systematic study of "objects" and "traits of customs and institutions that could have been explained, had time an4 means admitted of the inquiry" was lost.<sup>14</sup>

Mackenzie credited his meeting and subsequent association with Ca-velli Venkata Boria, a Telugu brahman, in 1796 with enabling him to enter into "the portal of Indian knowledge."<sup>15</sup> Boria was twenty when he was employed by Mackenzie to act as his interpreter and more importantly to direct a growing staff of Indians, who were to be employed for the next twenty-one years by Mackenzie in traveling throughout south India, collecting texts, inscriptions, artifacts, and all kinds of historical

and sociological information. Some of this vast amount of work was done with official patronage as an adjunct to Mackenzie's topographical surveying and mapmaking. Mackenzie was eventually to become the surveyor general of India. Boria at twenty had studied Sanskrit, Persian, Hindustani, and English, in addition to knowing Tamil and Telugu. At the age of sixteen he held his first job with the British as a writer and interpreter.<sup>16</sup> Until his death at the age of twenty-six in 1803 he accompanied Mackenzie, recording temple inscriptions, deciphering obsolete scripts, and translating books, manuscripts, and documents. In addition Boria, according to his brother Cavelly Venkata Ramaswami, wrote poems in Sanskrit and Telugu, including a poetical account of the fall of Seringapatam.

Mackenzie's ambition was to compile the source material necessary to write a history of south India. The Mysore Survey continued for almost ten years. Mackenzie summarized the results of this work:

1. The discovery of the *Jaina* religion and philosophy, and its distinction from that of Buddha.
2. The different ancient sects of religion in this country, and their subdivisions the *Lingavanta*, the *Saivam* and *Pandaram Matts*, etc.
3. The nature and use of the *Sassanams*, and inscriptions on stone and copper, and their utility in throwing light on the important subject of Hindu tenures; confirmed by upwards of 3,000 authentic inscriptions collected since 1800, hitherto always overlooked.
4. The design and nature of the monumental stones and trophies found in various parts of the country from Cape Comorin to Delhi, called *Virakal* and *Maastikal*, which illustrate the ancient customs of the early inhabitants, and, perhaps, of the early western nations.
5. The sepulchral tumuli, mounds, and barrows of the early tribes, similar to those found throughout the continent of Asia and of Europe, illustrated by drawings, and various other notices of antiquities and institutions.<sup>17</sup>

The most active period of the Survey was from 1800 to 1810, when Mackenzie became chief engineer for the expedition sent to Java. Here he remained until 1813, where along with his military duties he initiated a survey similar to that being carried out in south India.<sup>18</sup> Mackenzie then returned to his post as surveyor of Madras, and in 1815, somewhat against his wishes, he was transferred to Calcutta and appointed surveyor general of India. This enabled him to travel widely and explore much of north India. Mackenzie brought with him to Calcutta much of the staff who had worked with him in Madras, who were to be engaged in trying to organize the vast amount of materials which they had collected during the previous twenty years. Subsequent to Mackenzie's death in 1821, this staff was to come under the charge of H. H. Wilson,

#### TRANSFORMATION OF OBJECTS

who had been successful in having the Company establish an antiquarian department in Calcutta. This office was staffed by four translators, four pandits, a maulavi, and several copyists and peons. Wilson's primary interests were in the Sanskrit language and Persian, which he viewed as "the chief vehicle of the modern history of India." He had no knowledge of and little interest in the languages and history of south India.<sup>19</sup> Wilson had little interest in maintaining Mackenzie's staff, except as they were concerned with Sanskrit and Persian. The directors of the Company were long interested in Mackenzie's efforts to collect the materials to write a true history of south India. In 1810 they strongly expressed their admiration for the zeal with which he had carried out his statistical work and his "enquiries into the history, the religion and antiquities of the country."<sup>20</sup> They congratulated Mackenzie for providing the basis on which a real history and chronology of south India could be written, dispelling the idea that the "Hindoos possess few authentic records." They encouraged him to "digest and improve the materials" which he had collected and urged him to forward them for deposit in the Company's museum.<sup>21</sup> They also asked for an accounting of his own funds which he had expended so that he might be recompensed. It appears that Mackenzie never supplied the accounting.

In 1823 Palmer & Company, the executors of Mackenzie's estate, submitted a detailed accounting of his expenditures in assembling his collection, amounting to Rs 61,452. Palmer & Company pointed out that the accounting was based on scattered records and that the figure was undoubtedly an underestimate. They asked that the estate be paid Rs 100,000, a figure which the governor-general agreed to, but which the Court of Directors rejected.<sup>22</sup> Eventually, though, the court of Directors did agree to purchase the whole of the collection from Mackenzie's widow for £10,000. ^ Wilson, although he had little knowledge of the languages involved, and who seems to have dismissed most of Mackenzie's staff, undertook the task of organizing and publishing a catalogue of the papers, with excerpts, which appeared in two volumes of over eight hundred pages in Calcutta in 1828.

Wilson basically followed Mackenzie's own classification of the materials, which included 1,568 manuscripts in 13 languages in 19 scripts, which he described as dealing with "Literature." There were 264 volumes of what Mackenzie labeled "Local Tracts"; these were primarily based on oral accounts which Mackenzie's assistants had collected, and which related to the history of particular temples, kingdoms, families, and castes. There were also 77 volumes of copies of inscriptions recorded from temples, copper plates, and various grants, 75 volumes of translations, 79 plans, 2,630 drawings, 6,218 coins, 106 images, and 40 antiquities.<sup>24</sup>

Mackenzie, after Boria's death, established Boria's younger brother Cavelly Venkata Luchmiah as his chief assistant who trained and supervised the work of obtaining and collecting the vast array of materials in the collection. Luchmiah's original monthly reports for 1804 provide an excellent account of how the varied materials were obtained.<sup>25</sup> The reports are in Luchmiah's handwriting, in English, which although somewhat ungrammatical—he had difficulties with tenses—are quite clear and understandable. In the reports, he describes where he and the other collectors have gone, and who they talked with. Sometimes he provides brief summaries of the content of the conversations. There are frequent references to books bought and their prices. He also forwards to Mackenzie translations which were being done in various languages. He comments on sources of information which he is developing. He has heard about a history of a particular zamindari; he writes to the vakil who has the account, expressing his desire to meet him. Luchmiah reports that he is received with great respect by the vakil, who knows one of his relations. At his first meeting, which lasts three to four hours, the vakil learnedly discusses astrology, and Luchmiah does not raise the question of obtaining a copy of the history but assures Mackenzie that during his next visit he will undoubtedly obtain the copy which they are seeking. Luchmiah then follows up the discussion of astrology with a visit to the astrologer in Madras that the vakil thinks is such an expert. Luchmiah, having heard from his informant that the astrologer has a large collection of texts which have accounts of the lives of his clients, he decides to go see him "and try his skill."<sup>26</sup> Luchmiah day by day recounts for Mackenzie the letters received and sent to the various correspondents and assistants-

H. H. Wilson, as a means of illustrating the process by which the materials were collected, printed the "Report of Baboo Rao," Mackenzie's Maratha translator, of a trip along the Coromandel coast to collect historical information and coins. Day by day he reports where he has gone and who he has seen. Rao is asked by several English officials to take them to see a recently discovered temple at Mahabalipuram, and acts as their guide. He reports that he declined to accept four star pagodas for his trouble, "for fear of losing my character with my master."<sup>27</sup> Wherever Rao goes he first checks in with the local British official and presents letters of introduction from Mackenzie. Most of Rao's efforts were devoted to collecting "ancient books," which he would either buy or copy. Failing to obtain texts and documents, he would question elderly people, pujaris, local chiefs, learned men, particularly about the Cholas and anything which dealt with "Buddhas" and their conflicts with the Jainas.

Rao tracked down various stories about the discovery of hidden trea-

#### TRANSFORMATION OF OBJECTS

tures, old pottery, ruins, and statuary. Rao was told that four months before, a cultivator while ploughing a field struck a gilded image of the Buddha. He informed the managers of the nearby temple, who secretly took it into the temple thinking it was all gold, but it turned out to be a brass image which was gilded. After rubbing off eight or ten pagodas worth of gold, the manager of the temple was preparing to melt the image down and to make brass pots out of it, "to save their character and to prevent its coming to knowledge of the Circar people."<sup>28</sup> On hearing this Rao went immediately to the managers, who at first denied any knowledge of the statue, but after more questioning they produced it. Rao offered to buy it for sixteen or twenty star pagodas. The head manager of the temple, having heard what had transpired, refused to go through with the bargain, saying he would never agree to sell the image even for thousands. A frustrated Rao "resolved to wait for my master's orders before I should apply to the Collector."<sup>28</sup> Rao then went to the site where the image was found with four coolies, where they dug, but after finding only "a stone image of *Bouddha* and two covered wells," he suspended further search and returned to his house.

In Kumbhakonam, Rao visited the chief priest of the "Sankar Archari Math," and after spending four rupees on "fruit etc." he asked the priest for a copy of the copper inscription that was in the Math. The priest was willing, but the managers of the Math (*Kyasthalu*) vociferously denied that there were any inscriptions to be found. They were afraid of "loose-ing their original documents," which, Rao suggests, had saved them from "the destruction of different wars."<sup>29</sup> Rao reassured them that he only wished to make a copy, to which the managers agreed on the condition that Rao recommend to Mackenzie that a jagir that they once possessed be restored to them. Rao agreed to this. The chief priest was so pleased by this that he promised to get Rao a particular account of the "*Cholen, Cheran, and Pandiari*" together with the rajas of Bijanagur, as he was the "Guru of all the Rajas." He also promised to give him an account of all the "Rajas who had ruled since the commencement of the *Kaliyugam*," Rao was then taken in to the chief priest's *agraram* and shown 125 copper *sasanams*. Rao was dismissed by the priest with a promise that he would give him these accounts along with several coins, if there was any assistance forthcoming in getting the return of the lost villages.<sup>30</sup>

Although the bulk of the Mackenzie collection was in Calcutta in 1823, when Wilson began to work on it, some of it already was known to be lost or missing. In 1808 Mackenzie had sent seven volumes described as "Memoirs of the Survey of Mysore to London" as well as two volumes of maps.<sup>31</sup> In 1827 Charles Wilkins, the librarian of the India Office, could not locate these. Wilson, as he finished sections of the catalogue,

dispatched, in 1823 and 1825, portions of the collection to London. At the completion of his work in 1827, he sent all the works in Persian, Sanskrit, and Burmese, along with the plans, drawings, coins, and 106 images of Indian gods in silver, copper, and brass, to London. Some of these were displayed in the small museum which the Company had at its headquarters in Leadenhall Street. Also dispatched were five "large pieces of sculpture on stones from Amaravati," four smaller pieces and one "inscription on stone" from Amaracartu.<sup>32</sup> I will discuss what happened to these pieces subsequently.

Wilson also sent the materials classified as "local tracts," the accounts of the histories, stories, and descriptions taken down by Mackenzie's collectors from local priests, chiefs, and local scholars, to Madras, where they were, placed under the charge of the Madras Literary Society. With their arrival in Madras, C. V. Luchmiah asked that he be placed at the head of an establishment which would complete Mackenzie's work. This fell on deaf ears.<sup>33</sup> Luchmiah persisted in lobbying for his plan, and the governor of Madras was sufficiently impressed that he forwarded the plan to the governor-general, who in turn sent it to the Asiatic Society of Bengal, for evaluation and to make recommendations on what should be done about Luchmiah's plan. Luchmiah wanted in effect to reestablish Mackenzie's program for collecting, under his own direction. For a start he wanted permission to be able to correspond with "gentlemen" of "literary endowments" to enable him to procure information on the subject of the history and antiquities of India.<sup>34</sup> In addition, he wanted to hire in each district in south India two "intelligent scholars," one versed in Sanskrit and the other in "Oriental Literature," who would continue to collect materials for the project. The plan was referred to the Committee on Papers of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, headed by James Prinsep— who took a dim view of Luchmiah's qualifications and his plan:

Such an extensive scheme would need the control of a master head, accustomed to generalization, and capable of estimating the value and drift of inscription and legendary evidence. The qualifications of Cavelly Venkata for such an office, judging of them by his 'abstract', or indeed of any native, could hardly be pronounced equal to such a task, however useful they may prove as auxiliaries in such a train of research.<sup>35</sup>

Prinsep and the committee did however make a strong argument for making knowledge of the collection more widely known and that efforts be made to preserve it, and make it available to scholars. To this end they recommended to the government that William Taylor, a missionary in Madras who had published some "oriental historical manuscripts," undertake the publishing of translations from the Mackenzie manuscripts. Taylor was more than willing to do this, and quickly submitted a

#### TRANSFORMATION OF OBJECTS

budget to the Madras government of Rs 7,000 for eighteen months' work. He hired six pandits and munshis, as well as two "native writers." Over the next few years some excerpts appeared in the *Madras Literary Magazine*, and finally in 1857 the first three volumes of the excerpts appeared in Madras as *A Catalogue Raisonnee of Oriental Manuscripts in the Library of the (Late) College, Fort St George*. The corpus not only included the manuscripts sent by Wilson to Madras, but also some found in the library of East India Company by C. P. Brown in 1838. Brown also added some materials in Telugu and Tamil which he had himself collected. The Brown collection was shipped to Madras sometime after 1840. Taylor, who reprinted many of the excerpts already published in Wilson's catalogue, used the occasion to write an exegesis of his own theories about Hindu thought, religion, and what the true history of India had been. The materials in the collection on Indian architecture, wrote Taylor, were of little value as they contained too much on astrology. From the beginning of the work the reader is introduced to Taylor's overriding theory, that Indian culture is derived from Chaldean or Egyptian origins. There is in fact little or nothing in India which could be counted as their own; the Indians are merely poor imitators of an authentic antediluvian culture that existed in the Middle East. There is little to wonder at in the Indian mind, degenerate and debased. This is accounted for by the fact that "The Hindu skull is of a lower order than that of [even] the Celtic, and very inferior [to the] broad Saxon skull." The cerebellum of the Hindu brain is highly developed which accounts for the fact that their poetry runs rampant with "sexualities." The Indians have even outdone the licentiousness of Ovid in the way they "treat systematically on the *ars amoriis*."<sup>36</sup>

Taylor rejects the interpretation that the Indians have a theory of "moral action." This is easily seen to be wrong through his study of the *Bhagavad Gita*, in which Krishna advises Arjuna to kill without compunction or fear of moral retribution. He advises his readers that the proof of this assertion is to put the message of the *Gita* "into the mouth of any leading mutineer at Meerut." Then "the true character of the *Gita* will become instantly viseable." Because of the despotic nature of the Indian state, there is no chance for manly virtues to develop among Indians, as they are brought up to "cringe, fawn and flatter their rulers." Hence they have no sublime aspirations to pursue and under such circumstances the human mind becomes "naturally sordid, and wastes its time in puerile disputation."<sup>37</sup> The introduction to the materials in Volume Two is used as a platform to reiterate the major theme of the unoriginality of the Indians, this time with more attention to their romance-historical literature, which seems to be copied either from the ancient Jews or the Greeks.

The historical explanation put forward by Taylor is an account of the wanderings of the ancient Aryans, who brought this mishmash of "Hebrew Theology and Chaldean Sabism into India." There is a profound irony in the Mackenzie collection falling into the hands of an interpreter seemingly more familiar with the spurious and mystical Orientalism of the eighteenth century than with the post-Jones scholarship of the first half of the nineteenth century. The scholar to whom Taylor most frequently refers is Jacob Bryant, the eighteenth-century compiler and antiquarian. The members of the Asiatic Society doubted Cavelly Ven-kata Luchmiah's scholarly credentials, and instead they selected a crackpot to edit Mackenzie's papers.

Colonel Mackenzie's collection has not fared much better in the twentieth century. N. D. Sundatravelu, vice chancellor of the University of Madras, states in the foreword of Volume I of the Mackenzie manuscripts, edited by T. V. Mahalingam, Professor of Ancient History and Archaeology (retired) at the University of Madras, published in 1972: "The keen interest evinced by Western Orientalists and Indian scholars testify to the importance of these documents." He seems, however, to be at some odds with the editor of the volume, who states:

Scholars, who have hitherto attempted a critical study of the Mackenzie Manuscripts, have been sceptical of their historical value. "The attempt to extract history from the confused chronicles in the Taylor Manuscripts seems a hopeless task", says K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, while discussing the views of S. K. Aiyangar on Malik Kafur's invasion of the Pandya country. Mackenzie has often been admired as a pioneer in the field of oriental research and his collections have found their way into several footnotes. Still, the authenticity of the information contained in them has been doubted, however not without reason. For his collections are generally based on secondhand traditions and unverified reports. But they have their own place in the field of historical research in India. Their testimony may be used as circumstantial evidence calculated to supplement the results arrived at from other sources and to furnish further details on the subject.

It must be admitted that exaggerated notions on the value of the Mackenzie collection as containing original and authentic material are not justified.<sup>38</sup>

### Colonel Mackenzie and the Amaravati Marbles

I have not yet finished with the results of Mackenzie's dedication and almost demonic urge to reveal to the West the history of south India. In 1797 Mackenzie was carrying out a topographic survey in Guntur dis-

#### TRANSFORMATION OF OBJECTS

trict when he heard about the discovery of some antiquities in a small town, Amresvarem, on the Kistna river. He sent ahead his trusty guide Venkata Boria along with some brahmans and two sepoy. They were to make inquiries into the history of the place and to conciliate the inhabitants, particularly the Brahmans, "who are apt," wrote Mackenzie, "to be alarmed on these occasions."<sup>39</sup> On Mackenzie's arrival Boria reported that there was some apprehension at the approach of the British and their sepoy, but Mackenzie reassured the inhabitants that they had only come to look at the recently discovered ruins, which were being excavated by a local raja, who was using some of the materials in building a temple and his house. Mackenzie found a long circular trench 10 feet wide and 12 feet deep, which exposed a mass of masonry, and some slabs, some with bas reliefs on them. It was reported that some statuary had been uncovered and taken into the newly built temple.

One of Mackenzie's delineators, Mr. Sydenham, drew a number of the figures which were readily accessible. Mackenzie described seeing a number of lingams on the bas reliefs. In the mud wall of the temple he found a sculpture of "an attack or an escalade of a fortified place." The residents of the town believed that the remains were built by Jains. Mackenzie was generally mystified by the appearance of figures in the fragments that he saw:

The legs of all the figures are more slender and gracefully disposed than I have observed in any other Hindu buildings. It would be rash to draw any conclusions until an opportunity offers of observing more sculptures."<sup>40</sup>

It was not until almost twenty years later, in 1816, that Mackenzie returned to investigate the Amaravati tope. This time he had a full team, including four or five specially trained delineators, presumably the "country born" graduates of the Madras Observatory and Surveying School established by Michael Topping in Madras in 1794.<sup>41</sup> Mackenzie spent four or five months at the site and his assistants worked through 1817, producing "careful plans of the buildings and maps of the surrounding country, together with eighty very carefully finished drawings of the sculptures." James Fergusson stated that these drawings were unsurpassed "for accuracy and beauty of finish."<sup>42</sup> Mackenzie was never to write up a full description of the site as he found it in 1816, integrating the plans and maps and drawings done by his assistants. After his death an article based on two letters to Mr. Buckingham appeared, first in the *Calcutta journal* of 1822 and reprinted in the *Asiatic Journal* of 1823 under the title of "Buins of Amravutty, Depauldina, and Durnacotta."<sup>43</sup> In the twenty years between visits, the site was further destroyed, in the search for treasure (always assumed to be buried in ancient mounds), for building materials, and through firing of the marbles for lime. In

addition the raja had decided to dig a large tank in the center of the mound. Nonetheless large numbers of fragments of sculpture remained, to be described and drawn. Mackenzie was impressed with the skill of the mysterious artists, who carved with taste and elegance. The human figures depicted "were well executed" and the proportions "correct."<sup>44</sup> The site, he believed, was dedicated to religious worship, but of what kind he did not know, except that it was clearly different from the brahmanical worship of the "present day" as none of the Hindu mythological figures was depicted.

Mackenzie speculated that, because of the circular nature of the larger outline of the enclosure, it perhaps was the same religion as the Druids and that the temple was devoted to sun worship. He was further mystified by the discovery on sculptured slabs of inscriptions in characters "entirely foreign to these countries," characters of a type that Mackenzie had never seen before.<sup>45</sup> Mackenzie appears to have sent copies of the drawings and plans to London, Calcutta, and Madras. In addition, and to the frustration of subsequent scholars, pieces of sculpture were sent to Musalapatam, Calcutta, Madras, and London, but how many there were, and their provenance, continues to be a mystery to this day.<sup>46</sup>

In 1830, Mr. Roberston, collector of Musalapatam, found some of the sculptures, and obtained others from the site, which he set up in the square of the new market place he had built in the town. These were seen five years later by the governor of Madras who was on tour, and he ordered them to be shipped to Madras, so that they could be better cared for by the Madras Literary Society. Some of these wound up in the garden of the master attendant.<sup>47</sup>

The first effort at deciphering the script found at the site was done by James Prinsep in collaboration with Pandit Madhoray, the aged librarian at the Sanskrit College who had been one of Mackenzie's associates. Prinsep identified the script as being the same type as found in the cave inscriptions from Mahabalipuram, and similar to the alphabets of Chat-tisgarh. He denominated the characters as Nadhra, and he decided they were transformations of the north India Devanagari. Prinsep declared that the inscription "refers in all probability to the foundation and endowment of some Buddhistic institution by the monarch of his day." However, he was disappointed as the monarch was not named, hence the date could not be established; "history will have gained nothing by the document," he declared.<sup>48</sup>

The largest collection of the sculptures and fragments, ninety in all, from the Amaravati site were made by Sir Walter Elliott, commissioner of Guntur, in 1840. These he shipped to Madras, where for fourteen years they were stored, unexamined and undescribed until 1854, when Dr. Balfour, who was in charge of the Central Museum, made a list of

#### TRANSFORMATION OF OBJECTS

them. The description and analysis of these fragments was left to William Taylor, who again, as with the Mackenzie manuscripts, used the occasion to spin more hypothetical histories.

In 1857 the Madras collection, now dubbed the Elliott Marbles, was shipped to England, presumably for display in the Company's museum. They arrived in the winter of 1858, just at the moment when the Company's rule was being transformed into Crown rule. The marbles lay through the winter in open crates on a dock in Southwark. One of the better pieces was later affixed to an outer wall of the India Museum in Fife House on Whitehall, while the others dropped out of sight. In 1866, Henry Cole, who was organizing part of the British display to be shown the following year at the Paris International Exhibition, asked Fergusson to organize a display of archaeological and architectural photographs from India. Fergusson thought it would be a good idea to have some actual statuary on display as well. He remembered the Amaravati marbles, which he thought were "the principal ornaments of the Old Museum on Leadenhall Street." He tracked them down under piles of rubbish in the coach house of Fife House. Fergusson had a complete set of photographs, made by William Griggs of the India office, and by studying these, he sought to reconstruct the buildings of which they once were a part.<sup>49</sup>

As Fergusson studied the photographs he "perceived that they might be classified in three great groups." One, based on the analogy of San-chi, formed an outer rail as an ornament, and belonged by the main building, as was seen in Mackenzie's drawings. Another set, smaller and finer, Fergusson believed belonged to the inner rail. What remained he declared "were to no architectural value" and could be placed anywhere.<sup>50</sup> Fergusson's interest in the Amaravati site and its fragments' was to grow in the next few years into a major scholarly and intellectual project. He was determined to make the fragments tell part of the history of India. The representations of people, their clothes and ornaments, the animals, buildings and symbols, were to become for Fergusson a projective test.

Even before the Exhibition began, Fergusson was utilizing the photographs at a meeting of the Society of Arts, on 21 December 1866.. With Sir Thomas Philips, under-secretary of state for India in the chair, and with a distinguished audience including Sir Henry Cole, the impresario of the Great Exhibition of 1851, he delivered a lecture "On the Study of Indian Architecture."<sup>51</sup> Rather than giving a scholarly and detailed exegesis of the principles and history of Indian architecture, he made an argument about the utility of the study of Indian architecture for an understanding of the ethnology and religions of India, and about the value of Indian architecture as a source of ideas for the improvement of architecture in England. He began his lecture by describing what he

thought was the racial and ethnological history of India. He posited a distant past. Here was an aboriginal race in the Ganges valley, whose descendants were the hill tribes such as Bhils, Gonds, and Coles who had dominated north India. These people were conquered about 2,000 B.C. by the Aryans, a Sanskrit-speaking people to whom India owes its literary traditions, but they were not great builders, and like all outsiders to India, soon fell prey to the enervating climate and the degeneration which naturally followed, by their "intermingling with the aboriginal races." The Aryan's demise as effective rulers cleared the way for the rise of the great religious leader Buddha, who taught the people a new, pure religion, which following the iron law of decay in India, "gradually became idolatrous and corrupt" and perished beneath its own overgrown hierarchy. Simultaneously with the rise of Buddhism, there was yet another invasion of India, this time by the Dravidian peoples, who came also from the north, and who had crossed into India in the lower Indus valley. They traveled through Gujarat, and then spread southward through the Deccan. The Dravidians were a race of great builders, but "totally distinct from those in the North." A century or two before Christ, there was yet another invasion, the invaders unnamed by Fergusson, but settled in Rajputana and Gujarat. Some went as far south as Mysore and others went into the Agra-Delhi region in the north. The fourth invasion was that of the Muhammedan peoples. The fifth civilization to take over India "is our own."<sup>52</sup>

Architecture and its associated sculpture were for Fergusson the only reliable documents on which to build a "scientific history of India," a land where there "are no written annals which can be trusted." It is only when the annals of a king "can be authenticated by inscriptions and coins that we can feel sure of the existence of any king, and it is only when we can find his buildings that we can measure his greatness or ascertain . . . what the degrees of civilization to which either he or his people had attained."<sup>53</sup>

Fergusson summed up his brief arguments in the following terms:

I consider the study of Indian architecture important because it affords the readiest and most direct means of ascertaining the ethnological relations of the different races inhabiting India. It points out more clearly than can be done by other means how they succeeded each other, where they settled, how they mixed, or when they were absorbed.

In the next place, I consider it important, because it affords the best picture of the religious faiths of the country, showing how and when they arose, how they became corrupted, and when and by what steps they sank to their present level.

It is also, I believe, important because in a country which has no written

## TRANSFORMATION OF OBJECTS

histories it affords almost the only means that exist for steadying any conclusion we may arrive at, and is a measure of the greatness or decay of the dynasties that ruled that country in ancient times.

These considerations refer wholly to India, and to the importance of the study as bearing on Indian questions only; but I consider it as important also, because of its bearings on architectural art in our own country. First, because by widening the base of our observations and extending our views to a style wholly different from our own, we are able to look at architecture from a new and outside point of view, and by doing this to master principles which are wholly hidden from those whose study is confined to some style so mixed up with adventitious associations as our local styles inevitably are.

It is also important because architecture in India is still a living art. We can see there, at the present day, buildings as important in size as our mediaeval cathedrals erected by master masons on precisely the same principle and in the same manner that guided our mediaeval masons to such glorious results.

It also is, I conceive, important as offering many suggestions which, if adopted in a modified form, might tend considerably to the improvement of our own architectural designs.

Lastly, I consider the study worthy of attention from the light it may be expected to throw on some of our own archaeological problems.

Implicitly and explicitly, Fergusson in his 1866 lecture was enunciating a theory compounded out of seventy years of British Orientalist discourse. The primary components of this discourse revolved around India's double lack of a history. Since it has no documents, dateable records, chronicles, the kinds of materials out of which the West, constructed a history of itself, the British were called upon to provide India with a history. In a second sense India has no history as it has not progressed. All the civilizations which had entered India, except the fifth one, displayed the same history, by succumbing to the inevitable effects of the climate, and their intermingling with the inhabitants, which in turn lead to enervation and the falling into the hands of overdeveloped hierarchies.

The European past can be seen in India as in a museum. Builders in India have been doing the same thing since time immemorial, which enables the British to understand how their own great religious buildings of the Middle Ages were constructed. Finally there are policy considerations the British should learn from the experiences of the other invaders. The only way to survive and flourish in India is to remain totally separated from the degenerate races who inhabit the country, and they should live in such a fashion as to minimize the effects of the climate.

Fergusson followed his pragmatic lecture with an analysis of the Amaravati Tope in Guntur,<sup>54</sup> which in turn led to the publication of Fergusson's magnum opus of his later years, *Tree and Serpent Worship: or Illustrations of Mythology and Art in India in the First and Fourth Centuries After Christ. From the Sculptures of the Buddhist Topes at Sanchi and Amaravati*. The work proclaims itself on the title page as being prepared under the authority of Secretary of State for India in Council. In his 1868 paper, which was well illustrated with drawings based on the photographic collection, we find him reading an ethnology and a history into the sculptures, in which he finds three races; the Nagas, whose emblems associate them with snakes, are a handsome race, but are not the rulers of Amaravati. The Nagas were from Taxila "which seems to be the headquarters of snake worship in the early centuries of the Christian era. "Also represented were Jats, and thirdly there are the autochthonous—"Gonds or some cognate Tamil race."<sup>55</sup> The paper ends with an announcement of his next project, the publication and explication of how the arts of Europe influenced those of the East, along with an essay on tree and serpent worship. As promised, the essay appeared five years later; in seventy-five folio pages the reader is taken on a world historical tour, demonstrating that there was a worldwide Ur-religion based on the worship of trees and snakes.

In Fergusson's history of religions, bits and pieces of this earlier nature worship get woven together along with the speculative thought of a great religious leader into one of the progressive religions. Once again the Indians turn out to be losers. They had their chance to be with the winners in the religious sweepstakes, but they turned their backs on the Buddha, and kept up the old snake and tree worship. Not only had the poor Indians, as represented by the Naga people and their snake worship, blown their chance for real salvation, but they also had in their grasp the beginnings of Western monumental architecture as worked out by the Greeks and Romans.

The buildings and their decorative motifs owed their fineness to "Greek or rather Bactrian art. "<sup>56</sup> Fergusson faces a problem with his theory of Bactrian and Roman influence on the Amaravati site. He has to date it within A.D. 200 to 400. This he does, through developing a series of inferences, based on stylistic analogies found in the western Indian cave temples. This was counter to the inscriptional evidence, which made the site more recent than his argument for Greek and Roman influence would have sustained. Fergusson reserved his strongest argument for the relation of Amaravati to Rome to a footnote.

My impression, however, is that few who are familiar with the arts of Rome in Constantine's time, and who will take the trouble to master these Am-

#### TRANSFORMATION OF OBJECTS

aravati sculptures, can fail to perceive many points of affinity between them. The circular medallions of the arch of Constantine—such as belong to his time—and the general tone of the art of his age so closely resemble what we find here, that the coincidence can hardly be accidental. The conviction that the study of these sculptures has forced in my mind is, that there was much more intercommunication between the east and west during the whole period from Alexander to Justinian than is generally supposed, and that the intercourse was especially frequent and influential in the middle period, between Augustus and Constantine.<sup>57</sup>

Rajendralal Mitra, the first of India's Sanskritists and student of early Indian history who utilized European-based scholarship, took exception to Fergusson's theories on the origins of Indian architecture. In papers given before the Asiatic Society of Bengal, and then *The Antiquities of Orissa*, a two-volume work published in 1875 and 1880, and *Buddha Gaya: The Hermitage of Sakya Muni*, he mounted a full-scale attack on European assumptions, particularly those of Fergusson, of India's lack of originality and inventiveness in art and architecture, particularly the idea that there had been a strong influence of the Greeks and Romans in the development of monumental stone construction in India. Mitra approached the discussion of Indian antiquities and buildings from an historical standpoint, relating texts and inscriptions to his interpretation of the form and function and meaning of building, and the development of Indian artistic productions.<sup>58</sup>

Fergusson replied to what he thought was a cheeky and ill-trained Indian with a full-blooded defense of his own work, and by calling into question the capacity of any Indian to be able to master the methods which the understanding of Indian architecture required.<sup>59</sup> He began his defense by a statement of his love of India, recounting the delight "in visiting the various cities of Hindustaan, so picturesque in their decay, or so beautiful in their modern garb." He averred that all his "relations with the natives of India were of the most gratifying and satisfactory nature." He had enjoyed the hospitality of the rajas of central India, and he would never forget the "servants who served me so faithfully, so honestly, from the time I first landed till I left its shores."<sup>60</sup>

Fergusson had been in India from 1835 to 1842, a period he now looked back upon as a kind of golden age, before some of the natives were spoiled by contact with European civilization.<sup>61</sup> The agency of this change was the idea that Indians could become the equals of the British through education in the European fashion, which Fergusson stated they could not assimilate.

Bengalis—and for Fergusson, Babu Rajendralal Mitra was the typical case—had a marvelous facility for acquiring "our language, but only a

superficial familiarity with the principal features of our arts and sciences."<sup>62</sup> The great skill of Indians was the capacity for memorizing vast amounts of materials and amassing a great many scientific facts. This was not the same thing as acquiring by "long study and careful reasoning, . . . the great truths of scientific knowledge." The Babu was accused of using a German technique to establish a reputation, something an Englishman would never stoop to, by attacking Fergusson only to enhance his own reputation. In addition he posed as a "patriot" by "defending the cause of India against the slanders of an ignorant and prejudiced foreigner."<sup>63</sup> Fergusson argued that in his refutation of the Babu there was more than just differences between two scholars about the history of Indian art and architecture. He related it to the then current attack by Europeans in India on the Ilbert Bill, which would have made them subject in criminal matters to Indian judges. It is easy to understand, wrote Fergusson,

why Europeans resident in the country, and knowing the character of the people among whom they are living, should have shrunk instinctively, with purely patriotic motives, from the fatuity of the Ilbert Bill. It may, however, be useful to those who reside at a distance, and who have no local experience, to have it explained to them by a striking living example, wherein the strength and weakness of the cause resides, and for that purpose I do not know any example that can be more appropriate than that of Babu Ra-jendralala Mitra. If, after reading the following pages, any European feels that he would like to be subjected to his jurisdiction, in criminal cases, he must have a courage possessed by few; or if he thinks he could depend on his knowledge, or impartiality, to do him justice, as he could on one of his own countrymen, he must be strangely constituted in mind, body, and estate.<sup>64</sup>

Fergusson was certainly correct about the context in which what started as a scholarly debate about the effort to construct a history of India became centrally about politics, not just the issue of equality before the law but in all the questions entailed in the effort to represent to Indians their own traditions and pasts.

Thus far in this chapter I have been exploring one collection, that started by Colonel Colin Mackenzie and of the efforts at interpreting one archaeological site. It was not until 1942 that the Amaravati sculptures got the catalogue they deserved, when C. Sivaramamurti published his detailed descriptions of each piece along with a thorough iconographic and textually based commentary.<sup>65</sup> This was followed in 1954 by Douglas Barrett's discussion of the British Museum collection. Basil Grey, keeper of Oriental Antiquities there, commented that "the Amaravati sculptures are ranked with the Elgin Marbles and the As-

#### TRANSFORMATION OF OBJECTS

Syrian reliefs among the Great Possessions of the Museum."<sup>66</sup> Given the history of the collection, one might wonder what happens to those things in the British Museum which are not so ranked. The final irony, of course, is that the Amaravati sculptures are no longer on display.

Under the Company, official concern with the art, artifacts, and antiquities of India was haphazard, and filled with false starts. Efforts began through individual initiatives, but halted when the bookkeepers in Leadenhall Street became aware of the potential costs, and their ill effects on the balance sheet.

The most ambitious effort at providing a locus for the systematic study of Indian literature and history was the brainchild of Lord Wellesley, the first of the governors-general with an imperial vision, who founded, without the permission of the Court of Directors, the College at Fort William. This college had the purpose of providing a liberal education in western and Indian forms of knowledge to the young civilian appointees of the Company. Implicit in this was the necessity of the systematic study of Indian languages and literatures, by an accomplished body of Indian and British scholars.<sup>67</sup> Throughout the existence of the college there was to be constant friction about the costs of maintaining a faculty who were frequently more interested in scholarship than in producing useful textbooks and the daily grind of teaching young Englishmen.

The same conflicts plagued the East India Company's training college at Haileybury, established in 1805 as part of the effort to reduce the costs and significance of the College at Fort William.<sup>68</sup>

The most consistently important scholarly organization which concerned itself with the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge concerning India was the Asiatic Society of Bengal, founded in 1785. The society was a private body, with close official ties. Its membership always included the governor-general, who also frequently was the honorary president of the society. From time to time it received direct grants from the government, and had constantly referred to it matters which affected the study of Indian antiquities, and the development of the study of natural history in India.

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries most of the significant collections of texts, paintings, sculptures, artifacts, and even botanical and zoological specimens which were later to show up in museums in Great Britain and India were the result of individual and personal efforts, which were later sold or presented to the government. James Fraser, a Company merchant in Surat in the 1730s and 1740s, and the author of a history of Nadir Shah, made what is probably the first extensive collection of Sanskrit manuscripts, which he brought back to Europe partially as a means of transferring some of his money from India.<sup>69</sup> After his death his collection was sold by his widow to the Radcliffe

Library in Oxford, and then in the latter part of the nineteenth century was transferred to the Bodleian, and is the basis of that library's Sanskrit collection.

Some of the British in India were attracted to Indian painting more, it would seem, for its documentary value than its intrinsic aesthetic qualities, and a number of important collections were made during the second half of the eighteenth century. Sir Elijah Impey and his wife collected Indian paintings and "commissioned Indian artists to paint natural history specimens."<sup>70</sup> The largest and most important collection made in the latter part of the eighteenth century still extant is the Richard Johnson collection of the India Office Library. Johnson collected, as well as commissioned, a wide range of albums from the time of Akbar to the end of the eighteenth century. Johnson had made a large collection of Oriental manuscripts as well, totaling 1,100 volumes. Charles Wilkins, the Sanskrit scholar and the Company's librarian, examined the collection in 1807, when Johnson had offered to sell it in its entirety to the Company, and in recommending its purchase for three thousand guineas, wrote to the chairman and deputy chairman of the Court of Directors:

The books, as to the writing, illuminations, perfectness, preservation and binding are upon a par with any other collection which has come under my view. There are of course many in an indifferent state of preservation, a few works deficient in the number of vols and otherwise defective, and the binding, as is always the case, naturally bad and in a bad condition. On the contrary there is a great number of books of the first rank as to the beauty of the writing, and splendour of the decorations; and not a few exquisitely fine.

As to the subjects, there is a good proportion of the best Histories, many very valuable Dictionaries of the Arabic and Persian languages, several useful treatises on Grammar, etc., with a great many specimens of fine penmanship in various oriental hands by the most celebrated masters. There are also a great many distinct treatises on Mathematics, Astronomy, Music, Medicine and other sciences and arts; a very ample and curious collection of Arabic and Persian Tales, perhaps unique, with the works of all the most celebrated Poets. There are many works on Law, Religion and ethics, some of them splendid copies; many valuable translations from the Sanskrit into Persian; some works in the original Sanskrit and Hindi—a few rare; with a miscellaneous division upon a great variety of useful and interesting subjects; particularly a choice collection of statistical works consisting of particular tables and statements of the lands and revenues of several of the provinces of India."

#### TRANSFORMATION OF OBJECTS

Shortly after this Dr. John Flemming, who had been in the Company's medical service, presented the library with "eight miscellaneous paintings of religious subjects," but his massive collection of botanical drawings wound up in the collection of a Belgian nobleman. Francis Buchanan also presented his collection of official papers which included a large number of drawings done by Indian artists who had been employed by Hamilton during his Bihar Surveys.<sup>72</sup> These acquisitions marked the end of any purposeful acquisition of collections of Indian paintings by the India Office until the beginning of the twentieth century. Falk and Archer explain this lack of interest in Indian paintings in terms of the dominance of utilitarian and evangelical views of India, which saw its art as degraded, even obscene. What collecting was done for the India Office stressed the utility of books of reference and aids to language study, and increasingly from the middle of the nineteenth century, Indian handicrafts and textiles.

During the nineteenth century in England there were several important collections of paintings and at least one massive collection of Indian sculpture in private hands. In 1774, William Watson, a Company official, acquired a set of paintings during the Rohilla campaign, which in recent times has come to be known as *Manley Ragamala*, an album of illustrated musical modes. Robert Cran dates these as early seventeenth century. In 1815 Watson gave the album to his daughter, and wrote at the time that the album "gives you a perfect idea of the customs, manners and dress of the men and women in Bengal, Persia and most parts of the East Indies . . . also of their birds, trees and plants." He annotated the individual folios for his daughter.<sup>73</sup>

In a series of publications Mildred Archer has abundantly documented the patronage of the British, from the second half of the eighteenth century until the middle of the nineteenth century, of albums and sets of drawings and paintings by Indian artists illustrating the appearance, dress, customs, and occupations of the Indians. These sets seem to have been one of the major items which the British collected in India, either commissioning Indian artists or buying them in the open market.<sup>74</sup>

The people of India most accessible to the Europeans were their domestic servants. Most newcomers to India commented on the large number of servants which even a modest European household contained. Captain Thomas Williamson, author of the first British guide book for India, *The East India Vade Mecum*, London, 1810, explained the large number of servants was largely due to "the division of Indians into sects, called by us casts." Williamson lists 31 kinds of servants that a gentleman would need for his home and office, depending on his occupation and status. The servants as de-

scribed by Williamson were divisible into an upper and lower category. The upper servants, *naukeron*, held positions of trust or supervision and would not be expected to do menial work. The lower order of servants, or *chaukeron*, had their own hierarchy and were divided into those largely doing inside work, waiting on the table, cooking, acting as the wine cooler, the huka bearer, and the furniture keepers. The outside servants included a gardener, the palankeen bearers, a syace, a dhobi, poens, and the watchman and door keeper.

The household in many respects became the model which the British created for Indian society. The specificity of duties was assumed to be based on the caste system in which a member of one caste could not or would not do the work assigned to another caste. Functional positions appeared to reflect the hierarchy of the caste system, with the confidential servants being drawn from the upper castes of Indian society. A Muslim of some status was employed as a teacher and scribe. The table waiters were generally Muslim who had less scruples about handling foreign food. The cooks were generally low caste, untouchables or Portugese, as it was generally believed that upper caste Hindus would not touch beef: The *Khansman*, the butler, was usually Brahman or a high status Muslim; in some wealthy households he might be Portugese or Anglo-Indian. Ayahs were usually low caste, tailors Muslim; gardeners, washermen, and water carriers came from castes usually associated with these occupations. Those working in the stables as grooms and who also would take care of dogs and other household pets, were generally untouchable Chamars. Each occupational speciality with its assumed caste base, lived separately, usually in huts in back of the great house where their families lived and where they prepared and ate their food.

Throughout much of the nineteenth century the representation of servants and their duties was a major subject matter of paintings and drawings which were organized in sets, done by British and Indian artists, and sold as souvenirs to be brought back as one of the icons of the exile in India. Along with the servants, the depiction of the occupations, castes, and the varied dress of the Indians became extremely popular in India and in Great Britain.<sup>75</sup>

Typically in the paintings and drawings of the castes, trades, and occupations of India there is a total decontextualization of the subject. They are drawn without any background, and with an individual and perhaps his wife depicted with the tools of his or her trade or the products or goods produced for consumption and use by Europeans and Indians. Other popular forms of art which British collected were paintings of buildings, sometimes on ivory, religious ceremonies, usually the more bizarre the better, such as a hook swinging or the dragging of temple

#### TRANSFORMATION OF OBJECTS

carts, and holy men. There was a counterpart in clay of the depictions of the typical household servants and the Indian craftsmen.

Given the difficulties of shipping, and the generally low evaluation by the British of the aesthetic qualities of Indian sculpture, it would appear that few major collections of Indian sculpture were made during the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Partha Mitter has extensively discussed the collections which Charles Townly and Richard Payne Knight had made, both these collectors being interested in the significance of the works for their studies and interest in the relationship between the erotic and ancient religions.<sup>76</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting of the collections made was that of Charles Stuart, generally known as "Hindoo" Stuart, who was in India from 1777 until his death in 1830. Stuart is best known for his tomb in Park Street Cemetery in Calcutta, which is in the form of a small temple which was decorated with representations of Indian gods and two miniature carvings of "Indo-Aryan temples," and has a doorway which "originally belonged to an ancient Brahmanic temple."<sup>77</sup> At his death in 1830 the bulk of Stuart's collection was shipped to London, where it was sold by Christie's and bought by James Bridge, who in turn offered the collection for sale in 1872, when it was bought for a "song" by Sir Woolston Franks of the British Museum. In all, the collection contained 115 specimens.<sup>78</sup>

Some idea of how Stuart made his collection was discussed by James Prinsep, who was trying to translate the inscription on a stone slab which was in the Asiatic Society of Bengal's collection, and about whose origin little was known. The script appeared the same as one known to have come from Orissa. Lt. Kittoe was at the time in Bhubaneswar copying inscriptions on the temples there. He found himself "impeded and foiled by the Brahmans of the spot." When he enquired about their opposition or as Prinsep put it, "the cause of so unusual a want of courtesy," Kittoe was informed by the priests that "their images and relics were carried off by former antiquaries" and mentioned in particular a "late Colonel Sahib." On checking the records of acquisitions of the society, Prinsep found that General Stuart was the donor of "two slabs with inscriptions in Orissa." Prinsep hoped that the society would return the slabs to the temple from which they were cut.<sup>79</sup> The following year this had, been done, but Kittoe was not greeted with the cordiality and good will he had expected that the return of the slabs would have elicited. Rather the priests presented him with "a long list of purloined idols and impetuously urged him to procure their return as he had done with the Inscriptions."<sup>80</sup>

We have seen how surveys and exploration, conceived by individuals and by the Company for the amassing of practical knowledge as part of

the agency of rule, led to the formation of important collections. In addition, objects obtained through direct commission and the patronage of artists led to extensive assemblages of text and albums. Many objects of everyday use or produced for a luxury market in India could be bought in the market place. Bribery, extortion, and outright theft also played a role in the amassing of significant collections.

Perhaps what was seen in Great Britain, and by the British in India, as the most significant objects which eventually found their way into public repositories of valued objects were the result of warfare. Individual and state-managed looting were the source of what, for the first half of the nineteenth century, were the most valuable and popular objects brought back from India. Pride of place in the establishment of the popular interest of the British relationship to India were objects looted from Tipu Sultan's palace in 1799 at the fall of Seringapatam.<sup>81</sup> Included in this loot were Tipu's tiger, his helmet and cuirass, a golden tiger's head from his throne, a howdah, and one of his "royal carpets." These had been presented to the Court of the Directors and members of the royal family, and within a few years were to go on display in a room set aside as a museum in the Company's headquarters on Leadenhall Street.

There was a great interest in the prints and drawings of the events connected with the British victory at Seringapatam. General Sir David Baird's "Discovering the Body of Tipu," "The Death of Tipu," and the surrender of "Two of Tipu's Sons" all circulated widely.<sup>82</sup> There were shows, popular plays, ballads, and broadsides, all of which presented aspects of events: the defeat of Tipu and the triumph of British arms over the arch villain and embodiment of evil, Tipu the Tiger.<sup>M</sup>

Popular guidebooks and books about the architecture of London; published between 1820 and 1860, all included discussion of the East India House as well as the contents of its small museum. Admission was by ticket and the museum was only open a few days a week; a tip to the doorman would guarantee the visitor being able to see as much as possible. Although Fergusson recalled seeing the Amaravati marbles in the museum, none of the contemporary descriptions mentioned the sculpture.. All mentioned Tipu's tiger and the other memorabilia of the fall of Seringapatam.<sup>84</sup>

The following list drawn up by Britton and Pugin in 1838 gives some idea of the miscellaneous quality of the Company's collection.

The Javanese Tapir, a quadruped with a hide like that of the Hog, having a lengthened proboscis, and its hoofs divided into three parts; exceeding greatly in size the South American Tapir. This newly discovered animal is described in Horsfield's Researches in Java.

#### TRANSFORMATION OF OBJECTS

A collection of quadrupeds, chiefly of the Cat and Monkey tribes, from Java.

Collections of birds from Java, distinguished by the beauty of their plumage; of aquatic birds, from the same island; of birds from India, Siam, and Cochin China; and a small collection of birds from the Cape of Good Hope.

A Lion's skin brought from India, where this animal is so seldom seen, that doubts have been raised as to its existence in the Asiatic quarter of the globe.

A collection of Javanese insects, principally of the Butterfly kind.

A marine production, called the Cup of Neptune; curious corals, &c, from the vicinity of Singapore.

Beautiful models of Chinese scenery, consisting of rock-work, executed in hard wood, bronzed; temples of ivory, with human figures, birds, trees, &c., formed of silver, embossed, and mother of pearl.

Chinese drawings, one of which, representing a Chinese festival, is executed with more attention to perspective than the artists of China usually display.

A complete Chinese Printing Press.

The Foot-stool for the Throne of Tippoo Saib, formed of solid gold, in the shape of a tiger's head, with the eyes and teeth of crystal. A magnificent throne, to which this appertained, was constructed by order of Tippoo, soon after he succeeded to the sovereignty of Mysore. It was composed of massy gold, the seat raised about three feet from the ground, under a canopy supported by pillars of gold, and adorned with jewellery and pendant crystals of great size and beauty. This throne was broken up and sold piecemeal, for the benefit of the captors, to whom the produce was distributed as prize-money.

A musical Tiger, found in the palace of Tippoo, at Seringapatam. It is a kind of hand-organ, enclosed in the body of the tiger; the whole represents a man lying prostrate in the power of that animal, of which the roar, together with the groans of the victim, are heard.

The armour of Tippoo Saib, consisting of a corselet and helmets, made of quilted cotton covered with green silk; of a texture sufficiently firm to resist a blow of a sabre.

Bricks brought from Hills, on the banks of the Euphrates, supposed to be the site of ancient Babylon. They have inscriptions indented in what has been termed the *nail-headed*, or Persepolitan character, forming lines or columns; for it is a subject of dispute among the learned, whether these characters are to be read perpendicularly, like those of the Chinese, or longitudinally, like those of European nations. Some of these bricks seem to have been baked on a matting of rushes, the impression left by which is still

visible on the underside; as is also some of the bituminous cement, by which they were apparently united.<sup>85</sup>

Each of the major British wars and victories in the first half of the nineteenth century was brought home in the form of relics and trophies to be displayed by the Company in its museum or by the Crown in its armories in the Tower: a cannon cast like a dragon from Rangoon, swords, shields, daggers and other weapons from the Maratha wars. Of a more peaceful nature were Robert Gill's magnificent drawings of the frescoes of the caves at Ajanta. Most significant were those trophies marking the final triumph of the British over their most stubborn but respected enemy, the Sikhs. The most impressive of these trophies were on display in the Company's museum in 1853: the golden throne of Ran-jit Singh, the unifier of the Sikh nation; the Koh-i-noor diamond, which became one of the great jewels of the British crown. A spear and arms belonging to Guru Gobind Singh and thought by the governor-general "impolitic to allow any Sikh institution to obtain possession," went to the Tower. The weapons captured from the Sikhs and shipped to England were the embodiment of the martial traditions of the Sikhs; they all had "genealogies" and marked the state-building successes of Ranjit Singh. The British were anxious to obtain not only the Sikh symbols of secular power, but also a "true copy of the Gurunth or Sacred Book of the Sikhs," so that it might be translated into English.<sup>86</sup> The establishment of British hegemony over India was also a conquest of knowledge.

The end of the Third Mysore War in 1799 marked the establishment of the collecting of what were to become the popular relics of the British conquest of India. It ended with an event which had an even greater impact on the public consciousness, the "Mutiny." This war generated an enormous public interest, fueled by mass literacy and an illustrated press, who could define a host of heroes and villains: the "Pandeys," the rebellious and mysterious brahmans, who along with other militarized peasantry were the backbone of the Bengal army, who had traitorously murdered their officers and spilled the blood of innocent Christian women and children; the rebel leaders, a decrepit but nonetheless dangerous Mughal emperor, and the debauched half-Europeanized Maratha brahman, Nana Sahib. The heroes were staunch Christian avengers and martyrs like Nicholson, the men of action like General Neil and Major Hodson, the careful but effective generals, Outram and Havelock. There was even an Anglo-Indian hero, an employee of the Post and Telegraph Department, Kavanaugh, the first civilian to be awarded a Victoria Cross, and then there was Jenny, the daughter of a common soldier whose dream of the relief of Lucknow was to be memorialized by a highly successful poem by Tennyson, and in paintings, drawings, and ceramics.

#### TRANSFORMATION OF OBJECTS

Once again loot poured into England to be treasured as memorabilia of families, symbolizing the privation and the sense of triumph generated by the war. Eventually these objects or relics found their way into public repositories. Some objects in the National Army Museum's catalogue of "Memorabilia of the Mutiny" include a dagger belonging to Bahadur Shah II, shamshirs and tulwars surrendered by the king of Delhi to Major W. S. R. Hodson on 21 September 1857; a brass betel nut box owned by Nana Sahib, taken by Lt. Claude Auchinleck; a wooden spatula found in the massacre well at Cawnpore by Sgt. C. Brooks, 9th Lancers; a table made from a section of tree near which Major W. S. R. Hodson shot the Mughal princes and was fatally wounded; a porcelain bucket from the service of the king of Oudh; a fragment of a dinner plate from the service used by Sir Henry Lawrence at the siege of Lucknow; a silver-mounted brick from Lucknow; a kurta worn by Tantia Topee; a snuffbox containing a lock of Tantia Topee's hair; a silver ring taken from a dead sepoy; a child's shoe found in the massacre well at Cawnpore; and a manicure set found in the massacre well at Cawnpore. This last item is currently on display at the National Army Museum.

Let an Indian have the final say on this period of collecting. Rakhil Das Haider, a student in London in 1862, recorded his reactions to reviewing the collections at Fife House:

It was painful to see the State chair of gold of late lion of the Punjab . . . with a mere picture upon it; shawls without babes; musical instruments without a Hindu player; jezails and swords without sipahis and sowars; and above all hookahs without the fume of fantastic shapes.<sup>87</sup>