

Quadrant V – Notes

Programme: Bachelor of Arts (S.Y.B.A)

Subject: SEC History

Paper Code: HSS 101

Unit: Unit III

Module Name: Establishment of the Archaeological Survey of India

(Cunningham, Fleet, Taylor, Foote, Burges, Marshall, Wheeler)

Name of the presenter: Ms. Khan Zarin Sultan

Designation: Assistant Professor

College: Government College of Arts, Science and Commerce, Sanquelim

Introduction

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) under the Ministry of Culture is the premier organization for archaeological researches and protection of the cultural heritage of the nation. Maintenance of ancient monuments and archaeological sites and remains of national importance is the prime concern of the ASI.

Besides, it regulates all archaeological activities in the country as per the provisions of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958. It also regulates Antiquities and Art Treasure Act, 1972. For the maintenance of ancient monuments and archaeological sites and remains of national importance the entire country is divided into 24 circles.

The organization has a large workforce of trained archaeologists, conservators, epigraphist, architects and scientists for conducting archaeological research projects through its circles, museums, excavation branches, prehistory branch, epigraphy branches, science branch, horticulture branch, building survey project, temple survey projects and underwater archaeology wing.

Archaeological Survey of India

It was set up in 1861 with the primary object of surveying antiquarian remains in this country and their study. Archaeological Survey of India is the successor of the Asiatic Society of India. It was founded in its current form in 1861 by Sir Alexander Cunningham with the help of the then Viceroy Canning. Between 1865 and 1871, the Survey was abolished briefly due to lack of funds but restored by Lord Lawrence, the then Viceroy of India. In 1871, the Survey was revived as a separate department and Cunningham was appointed as its first Director – General.

In 1885 Cunningham retired and was succeeded by James Burges. The post of Director – General was permanently suspended in 1889 due to paucity of funds and during this period work was carried out by the superintendents. Lord Curzon restored the post of Director – General in 1902.

Alexander Cunningham

In 1861, Alexander Cunningham became first Archaeological surveyor of Archaeological Survey of India. His Primary concern was historical archaeology. Works of Chinese pilgrims – Faxian (Fa-Hien) and Xuanzang (Hiuen- Tsang) was translated into French and published in 1830 during his time.

He realised the importance of these accounts. Using this travelogue he located numerous archaeological sites and monuments – Taxila, Sravasti, Kausambi and Barhut related to Buddhism. He also laid firm foundation of historical archaeology in India. Alexander Cunningham was responsible for the publication of first volume of Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum in 1877.

James Burgess

In 1885 Cunningham retired and was succeeded by James Burges. He was interested in architectural surveys. James Burgess brought out two important publications – Indian Antiquary, 1872 and Epigraphia Indica. Twenty-four volumes of Archaeological Survey of India, New Imperial Series.

Robert Bruce Foote

Robert Bruce Foote served in Geological Survey of India between 1858 and 1891. He collected first Palaeolithic tool in a gravel pit at Pallavaram, near Madaras in 1863. He found over 450 prehistoric sites in southern India.

Thereby brought richness to Indian prehistoric material. His collections were housed in the Madaras Museum. He catalogued and published them in two volumes entitled The Foote collection of Indian Prehistoric and Protohistoric Antiquities in 1914. His contribution to prehistory is acknowledged by calling him as the Father of Indian Prehistory.

John Hubert Marshall

John Marshall was appointed by Lord Curzon to head the Survey. He served as Director – General from 1902 – 1928. He replenished and revived the survey. He dominated Indian archaeology for three decades and placed Indian archaeological works on a firm foot. His tenure saw:

- Enunciation of the basic principles and techniques of conservation
- Attention to the specialized studies of sites and other archaeological themes
- Excavation of early historic sites
- Appointing Indian scholars in superior posts of Archaeological Survey of India
- Important legislation – Ancient Monuments and Preservation Act, 1904 was enacted
- Exploration, excavation and conservation works took a definite shape
- Greatest discovery of Harappa and Mohenjodaro

Excavations at Taxila, Sravasti, Vaisali, Rajagriha, Sarnath, Sanchi, Pataliputra and Nalanda provided much needed information in the Buddhist studies.

Robert Eric Mortimer Wheeler

Mortimer Wheeler was appointed as Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India in 1944. He introduced scientific methods in Indian Archaeology. He established training school at Taxila. He rigorously emphasized the principles of stratigraphy.

He insisted on problem-oriented excavations. He provided systematic training to young Indian archaeologists – A. Ghosh, B.K.Thapar, B.B.Lal, S.R.Rao, K.R. Srinivasan. Placed South Indian Archaeology in definite chronology through his excavations at Arikamedu and Brahmagiri.

The official journal Ancient India started during his tenure. He established a school of Archaeology in 1960 as model training institute in the line of Institute of Archaeology, London. Training imparted at this school benefits the Central, State and University Departments.

John Faithfull Fleet

John Fleet was appointed as epigraphist in 1883. Fleet was soon establishing a reputation through his papers on the epigraphy and history of Southern India in for such as the Bombay Asiatic Society and The Indian Antiquary.

He also published his works on the *Pali, Sanskrit and old Canarese Inscriptions* for the India Office in 1878. One of his greatest works was on the hitherto uncharted Gupta period. *The Inscriptions of The Early Gupta Kings and their Successors* (1889), forming third volume of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicum*.

In 1895, the best of his works, *The Dynasties of the Kanarese Districts of The Bombay Presidency from the earliest historical times to the Musalman Conquest*, was published in the Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency.

Meadows Taylor

He excavated a number of megalithic tombs in Deccan. Taylor carried out significant archaeological excavations in Gulbarga. He published his findings in the Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy and the Journal of The Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.

He had acquired a proficient knowledge of the languages and the people of southern India. He is considered one of the earliest path breaking archaeologists in India. Rich tributes are paid to Taylor by Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in its numerous publications.

Taylor was an accomplished painter and a photographer, at a time when photography itself was in its infancy. His series of paintings on Ellora cave

sculptures earned him a great reputation as an established painter and sketch maker.

His beautiful sketches of the Golconda fort, Qutub Shahi tombs and Charminar, besides several other captivating local images, eloquently speak of his artistic skills and regard for Hyderabadi culture. He learned Persian, Hindustani and several Indian dialects, taught himself surveying, sketching and painting, researched and presented papers and lectures on Indian archaeology, architecture, literature and music, and designed and built buildings, boats, roads, dams, and reservoirs.

Conclusion

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) is a Government organization under the Department of Culture. It undertakes the responsibilities of carrying archaeological studies and preserving cultural monuments. It functions to 'explore, excavate, conserve, preserve and protect the monuments and the sites of national and international importance'. Archaeological Survey of India is the successor of the Asiatic Society founded by Sir William Jones.