

New province, old capital: Making Patna Pataliputra

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In 1912, Bihar and Orissa was carved out of the erstwhile Bengal Presidency as a separate Province. The next year saw the beginnings of one of the most lavishly financed archaeological excavations of colonial India in the new province—the Pataliputra excavations funded by Ratan Tata and supervised, on behalf of the Archaeological Survey of India, by D.B. Spooner. The excavations discovered Patna, the new Provincial capital, as the ancient city of Pataliputra. This essay traces the history of archaeological excavations at Patna between 1913 and 1918. However, it does not engage with Pataliputra as a pre-given, physically available site, which could be discovered through archaeological excavations. Against the backdrop of provincial reconfigurations across Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in the opening decades of the twentieth century, the paper explores the politics of place-making and provincial self-fashioning in early twentieth-century colonial Bihar. It maps how Pataliputra was brought into being through the place-making labours of colonial archaeology. And in tracking the different and changing trajectories of making Patna Pataliputra, the essay unearths how nationalist identities were deeply imbricated in the same disciplinary and institutional spaces opened up by colonial archaeological and museum practices.

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Making a Lost Capital

Patna is one of the most ancient cities of India.... This historic city has passed through many vicissitudes, but it has phoenix-like risen again and again from its ashes. Its latest revival is that which we are witnessing to-day, when it has again become a capital...

The modern scientific historian and his indispensable ally the archaeologist have brought to light concrete examples of the past glories of Patna in art and letters, religion and political dominions.

—Jadunath Sarkar¹

In the Delhi Durbar of 1911 George V, the King–Emperor, announced the separation of Bihar and Orissa from Bengal. On 1 April 1912, Bihar and Orissa was carved out as a separate Province with its capital at Patna. The next year saw the beginnings of one of the most lavishly financed archaeological excavations of colonial India in the new province—the Pataliputra excavations funded by Mr (later Sir) Ratan Tata and supervised, on behalf of the Archaeological Survey of India (henceforth ASI), by D.B. Spooner. The excavations discovered Patna, the new Provincial capital, as the ancient metropolis of Pataliputra—projected as the political and cultural capital of ancient Bihar and the seat of ancient Indian civilisation. This essay with its focus on the Pataliputra excavations of Ratan Tata will figure out the contingencies of this discovery and the making of Patna as the lost city of Pataliputra.

‘A place declared as lost,’ as Sumathi Ramaswamy has argued, ‘does not precede our labours of loss. It is instead their product and outcome...a lost place is fundamentally constituted...through the labours of loss that are performed around it.’² This article traces the making of a lost place and the consolidation of a particular field of knowledge mobilised around the apprehensions of loss. The making of a lost place is an exercise in ‘place–making’—the material–symbolic reconfiguration of landscape.³ It is ‘a way of constructing the past’, a way of making ‘personal and social identities’.⁴ The yearning for the lost, vanished and forgotten is an intrinsic condition of modernity, one that energises the production of history, ‘...a practice through which we cope...with being in exile from our pasts’.⁵ Therefore, this essay is also an exercise in trying to comprehend the circumstances under which the past returns to haunt the present as loss, as history.

In what follows, I will try to map how, in the early decades of the twentieth century, Pataliputra was configured as a seat of a vanished civilisation and lost

¹ Jadunath Sarkar’s *Foreword* to Manoranjan Ghosh’s *The Pataliputra*, p. vii.

² Sumathi Ramaswamy, *Fabulous Geographies, Catastrophic Histories*, p. 7.

³ See, Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Facts On The Ground*.

⁴ Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, p. 7.

⁵ Ramaswamy, *Fabulous Geographies, Catastrophic Histories*, p. 7.

grandeur by the discipline of Indian archaeology. This is not to argue that Pataliputra was plotted out on late nineteenth and early twentieth century Patna out of a *terra-incognita*. Pre-modern indigenous, Greek and Chinese textual sources cited the city as an important seat of political and cultural power.⁶ This essay is specifically concerned with the modern life of the ancient city. It tries to map the politics of late nineteenth and early twentieth century colonial–modern disciplinary practices, which tried to test the validity of pre-colonial, pre-modern textual toponymic traditions through the modern (read Western) disciplinary practices of unearthing scientific facts from the physical evidence of the soil.

However, this essay does not aspire to be an exhaustive survey of this vast field. I will take up a few archival files from the Office of the Director General of Archaeology, New Delhi, relating to the Pataliputra excavations along with the published reports of the ASI, and some late nineteenth and early twentieth century monographs, essays and articles to locate the changing configurations of Pataliputra. The essay will trace its evolution from a site of colonial and nationalist knowledge productions to a land strewn with material remains encoding the ancient glories of the modern nation in making and the distinct historicised regional identities within the nation. And, in the process, I will also try to figure out how the site itself shaped the evolution of the discipline of Indian archaeology in its formative years.

Rather than treating the colonial and nationalist agenda as diametrically opposite enterprises, I propose to unearth how nationalist identities were deeply imbricated in the same disciplinary and institutional spaces opened up by colonial archaeological and museum practices. This essay will not only tease out the tensions between the colonial and the nationalist practices, but also locate the different cracks and fissures within the nationalist discourse itself. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the old Bengal Presidency—Bengal, Bihar and Orissa—was subject to repeated territorial/administrative reconfigurations. It is precisely in this light of redrawing of provincial boundaries and the changing status of

⁶ Pre-modern Sanskrit, Greek and Chinese texts had cited Pataliputra as an important seat of political and cultural power. Most of the dynastic histories of the city started off with the foundation of Pataligrama by Ajatasatru of the Saisunaga dynasty and the transfer of the capital of the Saisunaga empire from Rajagriha to Pataliputra during the reign of the Saisunaga king Kalasoka, dwelling on its subsequent importance as the capital of Magadha under the Mauryas, especially under Asoka, and tracing its decline under the Gupta rule. It is only during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that modern colonial Indological scholarship—textual and archaeological—became obsessed with plotting the ancient city on the physical landscape of the empire. Within this changed context of colonial modernity, the ancient texts and the toponyms were exposed to a new order of modern scientific scrutiny—editing and translation—and colonial cartography and, later, archaeology tried to crosscheck the toponymic traditions of these texts with the physical material evidence gathered from the field.

Patna, from an appendage of the old Bengal Presidency to its reconfiguration as a new provincial capital, that I will trace the different and changing trajectories of making Patna Pataliputra.

Locating Pataliputra: Pre-Histories of Pataliputra Excavations

The geo-historical imagination of Patna as Pataliputra did not begin with the reconfiguration of the city as the new provincial capital of Bihar and Orissa in 1912; nor was it initially located in the archaeological literature of colonial India. It began with the colonial cartographic enterprise of mapping the Indian Empire and locating ancient toponyms on the map of the colony. To trace the beginnings of Pataliputra's discovery in modern Patna, we have to go back to early colonial cartographic literature, particularly to James Rennell's *Memoir of a Map of Hindoostan*, which first established the equation between Palibothra of the classical accounts, Pataliputra of the Sanskrit textual sources and modern Patna.⁷ Following

⁷ James Rennell, *Memoir of a Map of Hindoostan; or the Mogul Empire*. In fact, the toponymic equations between Palibothra of the Greek accounts, Pataliputra of the Sanskrit textual sources and the modern city of Patna as representing one and the same place was not a pre-given. Rennell's cartographic predecessor, J.B.B. d'Anville, in his *Eclaircissements géographiques sur la Carte de l'Inde* (Paris, 1753, translated by William Herbert as *A Geographical Illustration of the Map of India, translated from the French of Mon'. d'Anville, 1759*) had assigned the eighteenth century city of Allahabad as the site of ancient Palibothra of classical Greek accounts of Megasthenes and Pliny. And in the first edition of his *Memoirs*, Rennell concluded following Pliny that '...some very large city stood nearly in the position which he assigns to Palibothra; but that this city was the capital of India, and the place visited by the Grecian Ambassadors, I do by no means suppose. I rather incline to think that the city meant by Pliny, stood on the site of Patna; and that the true Palibothra was no other than Canoge, or Kinnoge....' (*Memoirs*, 1783, p. 40). And Rennell justified his preference for Canoge as the site of ancient Palibothra by falling back on the tales of glories of this ancient metropolis as it filtered down through these classical Sanskrit texts. In the third edition of his *Memoirs* (1793), Rennell revised his initial preference for Canoge and fixed Patna as the site of the ancient capital Palibothra. The cartographic plotting remained deeply textual. In fact, advances in colonial orientalist textual Indology ultimately, especially William Jones's equation between the Palibothra of the Greek accounts with Pataliputra of indigenous Sanskrit texts forced Rennell to discard Canoge and narrow down on Patna. (See, Sir William Jones, 'The Dissertation On Asiatick History (1793)', *Asiatick Researches*, Vol. IV, 1794, pp. 1–17.) Along with the usual cartographic paraphernalia of following old river courses and comparing the distances in Roman miles from the confluence of the Ganges and Jamuna to Palibothra as mentioned by Pliny, Arrian, Strabo and Ptolemy and converting the same to geographical miles and even marginalising the discrepancies of the literary accounts with the distances on the ground, Rennell pushed for Patna. The local popular tradition of late eighteenth century Patna that the city stood on, '...or near, the site of Patelpoot' her...' bore for the colonial cartographer the conclusive proof of it representing the site of the ancient city (*Memoirs*, 1793, p. 53). However, the technocratic claims of colonial cartography in plotting ancient toponyms on the modern map of the colony did not go unchallenged. The exact location of ancient Palibothra, specifically cooked up quite a storm. During his tours of the Patna and Gaya Districts in 1811–12 Francis Buchanan-Hamilton, the famous statistical surveyor of Bengal took it upon himself to crosscheck Rennell's assertions. He in fact agreed that Pataliputra of Indian textual sources was actually the ancient name

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Rennell's identification of 1788, early archaeologists like Cunningham and Beglar went on to re-inscribe modern Patna as the site of ancient Pataliputra.

In his famous memorandum of 1861, Major General Alexander Cunningham sought to rectify what he saw as governmental apathy towards the preservation and systematic investigation of the monuments of ancient India—the most 'authentic' indices of a 'lost, absent' Indian history.⁸ The mission was to bestow a 'gift of the past' to the Indian subjects by redeeming their apathy and inculcating in them a new sense of loss about their own history—a history for which there were no 'scientific records'. Reliance on material remains, then, became the sole avenue of 'knowing' history. Architectural and sculptural remains, along with stone and copper plate inscriptions, were privileged as a higher order of evidence—over indigenous textual records—in recovering India's pasts. It is within this changed focus on material remains as constituting the privileged body of historical evidence that Pataliputra makes its appearance in the archaeological literature of colonial India. Colonial cartographic and Indological scholarship centred on textual remains had already proposed the equation between Palibothra, Pataliputra and Patna. It now remained for field archaeology to establish beyond any doubts this equation at Patna, cross-checking earlier identifications with available material evidence of Pataliputra at Patna. This shift on *material evidence* as the new grounds for making Pataliputra at Patna did not constitute a sharp break with the methods of earlier identifications. In fact, the links between the cartographic plotting of Pataliputra in Patna and its archaeological discovery are too strong to be overlooked. The common ground was provided by a heavy methodological dependence of both these incipient colonial disciplines on textual sources. Armed with the

of modern Patna. However, failing to locate any material traces of the ancient grandeur of the city as described by the classical authors in the '...miserable dusty city of Patna...' he argued that the grand Indian capital of Palibothra of the Greek accounts could not be identified with the early twentieth century city nor with the local tradition of Pataliputra (See, V.H. Jackson ed., 'Journal of Francis Buchanan (Patna and Gaya District)', *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society* (henceforth *JBORS*), Vol. 8 (3/4), 1922. Buchanan, following Wilford, located Palibothra of the Greek accounts at Rajmahal). A few years down the line, in 1815, Major William Francklin published his first of a series of essays where using the Sanskrit and Greek textual traditions, he countered Rennell to argue that ancient Palibothra lay within the territorial limits of the early nineteenth century district of 'Bhaugulpoor' (See Francklin, *Inquiry Concerning the Site of Ancient Palibothra, conjectured to Lie within the Limits of the Modern District of Bhaugulpoor*). This debate on the exact location of the ancient city site was carried over to the early archaeological surveys. The engagement continued to be a well-entrenched textual one. As the early archaeologists laboured to fix Palibothra, Pataliputra and Patna as one and the same site, they now traded the Greek and Sanskrit sources for the recently discovered nineteenth century translations of the Chinese pilgrimage accounts of Faxian and Xuanzang.

⁸ The memorandum of 1861 from Alexander Cunningham to the Government of India was followed by Cunningham's appointment as the first Archaeological Surveyor to the government by Lord Canning in 1862. The memorandum appears in Cunningham's *Four Reports made during the years 1862–63–64–65*, Vol. 1, Preface, pp. iii–iv.

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nineteenth-century translations of the itinerary records of the Chinese pilgrims, Faxian and Xuanzang, Alexander Cunningham and his assistant, J.D. Beglar, sought to recover Pataliputra from its material remains of Patna and fix once and for all the equations of place names between Palibothra, Pataliputra and Patna.

Beglar and Cunningham, however, fixed this equation not by unearthing Pataliputra in the material remains of modern Patna. The singular absence of structural remains of the old city compelled the archaeologists to fix Pataliputra at Patna by inscribing the ancient city in the geography of deluge and loss. The geography of loss in which early archaeologists placed Pataliputra was allegedly wrought by ancient natural catastrophe—the changes in the old courses of the Son and Ganges rivers and the consequent flooding of the ancient city site—and medieval and modern vandalism of the antiquarian remains of Pataliputra by the ‘uninformed natives’, completely ignorant of the grandeur of the lost metropolis whose ruins they inhabited in the nineteenth century.⁹ It now fell to succeeding archaeologists to recover the last vestiges of Pataliputra from the ravages of men and time.

⁹ Patna as Palibothra in the archaeological geography of ancient India first resurfaces in Cunningham’s above-mentioned memorandum of 1861 to Lord Canning. While preparing a list of the ancient sites to be surveyed, Cunningham locates the Greek Palibothra in modern Patna. However, he goes on to add, ‘I am not aware that there are any existing remains at Patna, but numerous coins, gems, and seals are annually found in the bed of the river.’ (Cunningham, *Four Reports*, Vol. 1, p. vii). Cunningham inherited this skepticism about the surviving remains of the ancient city from his predecessor, surveyor Francis Buchanan. However, unlike Buchanan, Cunningham had his new archaeological bible—the translated itineraries of Faxian and Xuanzang. Comparing the Chinese toponyms with the Sanskrit ones, Cunningham had no doubt that Palibothra, Pataliputra and *Po-ch’a-li-tsu-ch’ing* referred to one and the same place. It now remained to physically discover the old city in the material remains of modern Patna.

Patna as Pataliputra now appeared in J. D. Beglar’s *Report of a Tour through the Bengal Provinces*. Beglar located Pataliputra in Patna. He did so not by unearthing its old material remains but by tracing the old courses of its adjoining rivers, mainly that of the Son. This process, as a study of his *Report* shows, was also heavily dependent on the rediscovered textual sources. Unlike most other ancient sites, the decline of Pataliputra did not fit into the usual colonial narrative of Muslim invasions and iconoclasm. In fact Beglar used the complete silence of the Muhammadan records—the nineteenth century translations of *Tarikh-i Sher-Shahi* and *Ain-i Akbari*—to show that all traces of the old grandeur of Pataliputra had long disappeared before the Muslims appeared on the scene. Beglar, however, failed to discover any of the old remains of ancient pre-Muhammadan Pataliputra except for *Bhikna Pahari* and a few other ancient looking mounds in the southern outskirts of nineteenth century Patna. To account for this void, Beglar now turned to his study of the old courses of the adjoining rivers of Pataliputra as described in the old literary sources. Beglar began by drawing on William Jones’s identification of the Greek *Erranoboas* as the *Hiranyavaha* of the Sanskrit sources. He accepted this equation but unlike Rennell, Beglar refused to identify this *Hiranyavaha* with the Son River. He argued that if ancient Palibothra stood at the confluence of the Ganges and the *Erranoboas*, and if its site was correctly represented by Patna, then the *Son* and the *Erranoboas* were distinct rivers. Tracing *Son* through the Buddhist, Hindu and Greek records, Beglar argued that the ancient *Erranoboas* or the *Hiranyavaha* which joined the Ganges at the site of the old Pataliputra was the modern Gandak

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During 1890s and early 1900, L.A. Waddell and P.C. Mukharji worked to unearth the surviving material remains of ancient Pataliputra in modern Patna. The journey of Pataliputra from the earlier geographies of loss to its reinscription in a new geography of extant material remains was also deeply imbricated in the literary sources, even more than Cunningham's and Beglar's projects. Waddell's *Discovery of the Exact Site of Asoka's Classic Capital Pataliputra, the Palibothra of the Greeks and the Description of Superficial Remains* (1892) marked the beginnings of this shift.¹⁰

In early 1892, taking Xuanzang as his guide and dismissing the early conjectures of loss promoted by Beglar and Cunningham, Waddell set out to prove '...that not only has the site of Pataliputra remained practically unencroached on by the

and not the Son. But Son played a very important role in shaping the fortunes of Beglar's Pataliputra. From a comparative study of the literary sources, Beglar concluded that the change in the original course of the Son occurred just before the Muhammadan invasion. The change in the old course of the Son resulted in the formation of a new tract of land between Arrah and the Ganges and a cutting away of a large portion of the southern banks of the Ganges from Patna to Fatuha by the Ganges. 'Accordingly, as Pataliputra occupied the south banks of the Ganges before the change of the course of the Son, all or almost all the traces of the ancient city must long since have been swept away by the Ganges.' Beglar thus concluded, '[M]odern Patna consequently does not stand on the site of old Pataliputra, but very close to it, the old city having occupied what is now the bed of the Ganges...' (See, J.D. Beglar, *Report of a Tour through the Bengal Provinces*, pp. 24–25).

As an ancient lost geographical place Pataliputra next resurfaces in Volume 11 and 15 of Cunningham's Reports. This time it received the personal attention of the Director General. In his *Report of Tours in the Gangetic Provinces* and *Report of a Tour in Bihar and Bengal in 1879–80, from Patna to Sunargaon*, Cunningham tried to reconstruct the lost capital by closely retracing the footsteps of the Chinese pilgrims, Faxian and Xuanzang. Failing to unearth substantial material remains of the old city in late nineteenth century Patna, Cunningham, like Beglar before him, attributed Pataliputra's destruction to the changes in the ancient course of the river Son and the consequent flooding of Pataliputra either by the Ganges or the Son. However, unlike Beglar, Cunningham argued following the Chinese pilgrims' graphic description of Pataliputra, that portions of the old city, particularly the parts rebuilt in stone by Asoka and the remains of the ancient city of Nili with all its palaces, stupas, edict pillars and monasteries, could still be recovered by excavating the Panch Pahari region. His trial excavations in and around the village of Nirandpur in the Panch Pahari region yielded nothing of the grand stone structures but only modest brick remains. To account for the absence of grand material remains Cunningham argued that in building his fort at Patna in the mid sixteenth century '...Sher Shah retained the lines of [the old] rampart as well as ditches of the old city, and that his principal work was restoration. To carry this out... every old building would have been sacrificed...so that we need not wonder that not one stone is left... within the limits of the ancient city' (Cunningham, *Report of Tours in the Gangetic Provinces from Badaon to Bihar in 1875–76 and 1877–78*, p. 157). The Muslims, spared in Beglar's *Report* of the burden of destroying the old metropolis, now resurfaced in Cunningham as responsible for the spoliation of the grand archaeological remains of Pataliputra, robbing the colonial archaeologists of the last vestiges of their authentic material evidence of the grand metropolis.

¹⁰ L.A. Waddell, *Discovery of the Exact Site of Asoka's Classic Capital Pataliputra, the Palibothra of the Greeks*.

Ganges, but that all the chief landmarks of Asoka's palaces, monasteries and monuments remained so potent that in the short space of one day I was able to identify most of them...'¹¹ However, both Waddell's *Discovery*, and in his subsequent excavations as embodied in his *Report on the Excavations at Pataliputra* (1903)¹², and Babu Poorno Chandra Mukharji's excavations in Patna during 1896–97¹³ failed to throw up any grand extant structural remains of ancient, particularly Mauryan, Pataliputra. In course of their excavations, Waddell and Mukharji only fixed some locales on the outskirts of Patna—Kumrahar, Nauratanpur and others—as tentative sites of the ancient city. The actual discoveries only amounted to portions of old brick walls, broken fragments of old pillars and a pillar capital, which from its style of craftsmanship Waddell dated back to Mauryan antiquity and read a distinctly Greek, specifically quasi-Ionic, influence in its execution.¹⁴ Failing to unearth any substantial evidence of the grand remains of the old city, like Beglar and Cunningham before him, Waddell was compelled to take recourse to place Pataliputra in a landscape of loss. However, Waddell's narrative of loss was not irrecoverable. From the modest discoveries of his hurried tours in 1890s and early 1900, Waddell was convinced that extensive deep digging at the site of the old city with Government support would yield the rich remains of Mauryan antiquity.

In 1903, the Government was in no mood to sanction the great expenses needed for such deep digging. And Waddell himself suggested that such excavations could be carried out in future as a prospective famine relief work. Such excavations, when it started in 1913 under the supervision of D.B. Spooner of the ASI, did not have to wait for an all-out famine. It started within a year of the creation of the new province of Bihar and Orissa with its capital at Patna and with the lavish financial aid from Ratan Tata. The following sections will focus on the renewed urgency of this discovery, marking out how different players in the game tackled the questions of foreign influence on ancient Indian civilisation and the question

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2.

¹² L.A. Waddell, *Report on the Excavations at Pataliputra (Patna), the Palibothra of the Greeks*, 1903.

¹³ M. Ghosh in his book *The Pataliputra* (1919) mentions Mukharji's unpublished report on the Patna excavations. Subsequent works, however, classify the report as lost. I have personally looked into the Bihar State Archives, Patna, National Archives of India, New Delhi and West Bengal State Archives, Indian Museum and the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, for this report. I have not been able to locate the work in any of these institutions. The published portions of Mukharji's reports on Patna excavations are as follows: 'Reports Made During the Progress of Excavations at Patna, Report No. 1–December, 1896', *Indian Antiquary*, November, 1902, pp. 437–41; 'Reports Made During the Progress of Excavations at Patna, Report No. 2–January, 1897', *Indian Antiquary*, December, 1902, pp. 495–98; and 'Reports Made During the Progress of Excavations at Patna, Report No. 3–February, 1897', *Indian Antiquary*, February, 1903, pp. 76–80.

¹⁴ See, Waddell's *Discovery of the Exact Site of Asoka's Classic Capital Pataliputra* and *Report on the Excavations at Pataliputra* and Mukharji's 'Reports Made During the Progress of Excavations at Patna'.

of Indian participation in the archaeological discovery of ancient India. Judged from hindsight, Waddell's major break from earlier colonial engagements with Pataliputra seems to be his discovery of the surviving remains of the old city in modern Patna, which as he himself put it, was '...the modern capital of the *Province of Bihar*.'¹⁵ Clearly, Waddell was not referring to the Province of Bihar and Orissa as it was configured after 1912, but to an administrative division of the old Bengal Presidency and its divisional headquarters. However, the 1890s also marked the beginnings of the movement for the creation of a separate province of Bihar from the old Bengal Presidency, and Patna emerged as the main centre of this movement. In the subsequent sections, I will locate the new labours of making Patna Pataliputra between the custodial pulls of the newly created Province and the emerging nation over the ruins of this lost capital.

New Archaeology, New Province

The next round of our story opens in 1913—a decade after the publication of Waddell's report on the Pataliputra excavations. This time, the excavations were conducted under the supervision of D.B. Spooner, the then Superintendent of the Eastern Circle of the ASI, with lavish financial support from Ratan Tata. These place-making labours were enacted in a different socio-historical world, very different from those informing the previous engagements with Pataliputra. The decade between the publication of Waddell's *Report* (1903) and the beginnings of this new phase of excavations at Patna in 1913 had witnessed substantial changes both in the disciplinary parameters and the institutional structure of the ASI and in the provincial territorial configurations of the old Bengal Presidency. These changes informed substantially the politics of this new round of place-making operations at Patna.

The closing decades of the nineteenth century witnessed severe bureaucratic retrenchment of Government funds, especially for the ASI. Several higher posts in the Department were devolved for lack of funds and the Survey remained an organisation without any central control or direction. George N. Curzon's appointment as the Viceroy in 1898 saw far-reaching changes both in the institutional organisation of the then almost-defunct ASI and in the disciplinary parameters of archaeological practice.¹⁶ On landing in India, Curzon was faced with a Survey robbed of its staff and Government grants. One of the first steps that Curzon took for restructuring the almost-defunct Survey was to revive the post of the Director-General of Archaeology. Lengthy negotiations followed with the India Office, London. Curzon ultimately succeeded in winning over the Secretary of State to

¹⁵ Waddell, *Discovery of the Exact Site of Asoka's Classic Capital Pataliputra*, p. 1.

¹⁶ For a recent detailed biography of Curzon see, D. Gilmour, *Curzon*.

revive the post, which had been abolished after James Burgess's retirement. In October 1901, the search for the new Director was concluded with John H. Marshall's appointment as the new Director-General of Archaeology in India. In February 1902, Marshall landed in India to take up the responsibility of the new office. Though Marshall had no background in Indian history or archaeology, he was the first professionally trained archaeologist to head the Archaeological Department in India. In fact, the arrival of Marshall marked the beginnings of the end of earlier decades of self-trained scholars and relic hunting in archaeological practice. This is not to suggest that the Marshall era in Indian archaeology witnessed a complete marginalisation of amateur participation in archaeology at the cost of the consolidation of the professional field. The lines demarcating amateur and professional participation in archaeology, as we shall see, were still very fluid. However, what the Marshall era really witnessed was a growing concern with the practice of 'scientific archaeology' and a field of practice where there was an increased effort at professional training.

Marshall had initially planned to introduce the methods of Western scientific archaeological excavations, which he had acquired in Greece and Crete. But his mentor, Lord Curzon, was more keen on conservation. Through a series of legal enactments, including the famous Ancient Monuments Preservation Act of 1904 and the construction of site museums directly under the control of the ASI, Curzon inaugurated a massive programme for on-site protection of movable antiquities across the country. This fetish with on-site preservation and restorations of the colony's antiquarian remains in the name of scientific archaeological practice had a huge impact on the next round of operations at Patna.¹⁷

Outside the Archaeological Department, Curzon's viceroyalty also witnessed far-reaching changes. For our present purposes, what is of prime importance is the particular redrawing of provincial boundaries he affected in eastern India. Curzon's East-West 'partition' of Bengal in 1905 marked the beginnings of provincial reorganisations across Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. It created two provinces out of the old Bengal Presidency—Eastern Bengal along with Assam with its capital in Dacca and the rest of Bengal with Bihar and Orissa with its capital in Calcutta. The territorial reconfigurations of 1905 did not, however, meet the popular demands. In Bengal, Curzon's scheme was faced with a strong backlash of nationalist politics.¹⁸ The movement for the creation of a separate province of Bihar had also been brewing in Patna since the 1890s with two opposing newspaper groups as the spokesmen—the pro-separation *Behar Times* (later the *Beharee*) group led by prominent Bihari leaders like Sachchidananda Sinha and Mahesh Narayan,

¹⁷ For a detailed history of the Curzon and Marshall era in Indian archaeology, see Sourindranath Roy, *The Story of Indian Archaeology*, and Nayanjot Lahiri, *Finding Forgotten Cities*.

¹⁸ For a history of the Partition and anti-partition politics, see Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903–1908*.

and the anti-separation lobby of the *Behar Herald*, led by the prominent Bengali residents of Patna like Gurupada Sen. The movement ultimately bore fruit during the next round of provincial reconfigurations in 1911.

Lord Hardinge, an old friend of Curzon, was appointed the Viceroy of India, following Lord Minto. His vicerealty witnessed several important administrative changes. The first was the transfer of the capital of the Indian Empire from Calcutta to Delhi. In the extravagant Delhi Durbar of 1911, held in the honour of George V, Hardinge launched an administrative reorganisation programme designed to end the era of bureaucratic centralisation initiated by Curzon. First, he got revoked Curzon's 'partition' of Bengal. Next, he got endorsed the separation of Bihar and Orissa from Bengal. In accordance with the royal proclamation of 1911, in 1912, Bihar and Orissa was carved out as a separate province with its capital at Patna. The new capital of the newly configured province, Patna, thus provided the grounds for the next round of archaeological engagements with the old capital, Pataliputra.¹⁹

Though the changed status of Patna as a new provincial capital and reorganisation of the Archaeological Department under Curzon and Marshall informed substantially the fresh round of archaeological engagement with Pataliputra, the initial move for these new excavations did not come either from the new provincial government of Bihar and Orissa or from the ASI. Waddell's and Mukharji's excavations in the 1890s and early 1900 had already anticipated the vast expenditure needed for such deep diggings at Patna. And in 1911–12 the Government of India was in no mood for granting such huge sums to the Archaeological Survey needed for Pataliputra excavations.²⁰ The required financial support came from a completely different quarter, a private entrepreneur, Mr Ratan Tata of Bombay.

The Pataliputra Excavations of Ratan Tata: The Bargains

Mr (later Sir) Ratan Tata, the Parsi millionaire of Bombay, was the younger of the two sons of Jamshetji Tata, India's pioneering steel magnate. Unlike his father,

¹⁹ For a history of the redrawing of provincial boundaries during Curzon and post-Curzon eras leading to the ultimate reconfiguration of Bihar and Orissa as a separate province in 1912, see Sachchidananda Sinha, *Some Eminent Behar Contemporaries*.

²⁰ To tide over the financial crunch of 1911–12, Hardinge's Government, in fact, made an abortive attempt to decentralise the Archaeological Survey by abolishing the post of the Director-General of Archaeology in India and replacing it by a Professor of Archaeology to be attached to a proposed Oriental Research Institute. Thus, when Marshall was on leave in England during 1911–12, he was threatened with the abolition of his office. The proposal, however, raised a storm of protest in India and London and pressures from influential quarters, including the past two Viceroys, Curzon and Minto, and ultimately led Hardinge to back out from the retrenchment scheme. Marshall was ultimately recalled and he landed in India in February 1912 to resume his office. The Department and its Director had just been saved from the axe of bureaucratic retrenchment, and the lavish funds needed for Pataliputra excavations could not be immediately generated from within the Survey. See Lahiri, *Finding Forgotten Cities*.

Ratan Tata was not known for his industrial talents. It was a different kind of public enterprise—philanthropy and art connoisseurship—which brought him into the limelight.²¹

During his visit to England in 1912–13, Ratan Tata met Marshall who was on his home leave, still uncertain about the future of his office in India. During this visit, Tata is believed to have communicated to Marshall his willingness to support archaeological work in India. However, not much could be done at the moment and neither was Pataliputra Tata's first chosen site. Complex and protracted negotiations between the private entrepreneur, the Archaeological Department and local governments ultimately induced Ratan Tata to settle on funding the Pataliputra excavations from 1913 onwards.²² Private enterprise and support of archaeological work in colonial India, as Nayanjot Lahiri has rightly argued, did not begin with Ratan Tata. She cites instances of native princes, local landlords and religious communities, across the subcontinent, who had financed archaeological excavations and restorations before Tata. Lahiri argues that, unlike the earlier groups, Tata was perhaps the first patron who was willing to finance archaeological work '...unrelated either to the religion or the region to which he himself belonged'.²³ In fact, unlike other private patrons of archaeological works, Tata was almost an honorary European without any particular affiliation to a distinct territorial region. However, a study of the literature produced around the excavations would show that the Pataliputra antiquities and the site itself became embroiled in a whole range of debates. In this battle over the indigeneity and authenticity of ancient Indian civilisation and the conflicting custodial claims of the nation and the province over the Pataliputra antiquities, both religion and the region of the patron would feature in a major way.

Marshall, still on leave in England, began campaigning actively for Tata's proposed project. Apart from the fact that Tata's funding would allow the Survey to carry out excavations on a scale which the Department could not dream of with

²¹ Ratan Tata supported the non-cooperation movement led by Gandhi in South Africa and also extended financial support to Gopal Krishna Gokhale to set up the Servants of India Society. Tata also provided financial support to the University of London to institute a Chair at the London School of Economics to carry out researches into the causes of destitution and poverty. In Bengal, he endowed a house at Shantiniketan for European research scholars coming to India to study Oriental literature and culture. Besides public philanthropy, Tata was a keen art connoisseur. He maintained exquisite mansions—the Tata House, which he built in Bombay, and the York House in Twickenham, England, which he bought from the Duc d'Orleans. In accordance with Ratan Tata's will, on his death, the fine arts collection in his Bombay house and the York House was made over to the newly established Prince of Wales Museum in Bombay. For a biographical sketch of Ratan Tata, see http://www.tata.com/0_b_drivers/sir_ratan.htm (accessed 3 August 2008).

²² For a recent account of the history of Pataliputra Excavations from 1913 onwards and the patronage of the project by Ratan Tata, see Nayanjot Lahiri's chapter 'Among the Cities and Stupas', particularly pp. 106–12, in her book *Finding Forgotten Cities*.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 107–08.

its own limited resources, Marshall argued that the proposal deserved favourable consideration ‘...for it is just private interest and support in archaeological research which we want.’²⁴ However, Tata’s generous offer was not unconditional. From the very beginning, he clearly stated his priority to finance the excavation of a ‘Greco–Buddhist site in the Peshawar District on account of the artistic interest of the sculptures found in these parts...’²⁵ Tata’s private connoisseurship interest behind financing archaeological excavations comes out loud and clear. Tata, however, did not want to keep the antiquities collected behind the closed doors of his mansions. According to the terms of agreement that Tata had initially visualised, these antiquities from the proposed excavations would be eventually housed in the Prince of Wales Museum—then being built in Bombay—and that his name should remain attached to it. Marshall thought that Tata’s wish ‘...only natural, though personally I should prefer to see any new finds of Greco–Buddhist sculptures added to an existing collection’ in the Peshawar Museum.²⁶ Though Marshall was convinced about the material and moral incentives of Tata’s proposal, he was also aware of the tricky part of the proposal regarding the disposal of antiquities. The reorganisation of the Survey under Curzon and the changed ethos of archaeological work, particularly the preservation of antiquities at the site or at best within the provincial limits, constituted the main hurdle in Tata’s financing archaeological excavations in the Frontier area. Taxila, the Greco–Buddhist site on the North–West Frontier Province, was soon to be excavated and the ancient city site was most likely to yield antiquities of the kind, such as sculptures, that Tata was looking for. Marshall was personally willing to make certain concessions to Tata’s proposal ‘...as long as the objects [antiquities] will be available to the public and to the students of archaeology.’²⁷ However, the imperial government apprehended that the local government would never allow Tata to cart away the antiquities to the distant museum in Bombay. And even many of Marshall’s colleagues within the Department did not see eye to eye with the Director.

On his arrival in India in February 1912, Marshall started looking for prospective archaeologists who could supervise the excavation Tata proposed. From the very beginning, Aurel M. Stein made his objections to the project loud and clear. Apart from his personal inclinations for Turkestan, Stein pointed out several general problems that such an undertaking would pose. Fixing the budget and scheme of work, the conditions about the publication of the results and the tricky question about the ultimate custodial rights over the antiquities—all these needed to be settled before any excavations commenced. Stein suggested that estimates should

²⁴ Letter of John H. Marshall, Office of the Director General of Archaeology in India, to L. Porter of the Department of Education of 6 January 1912, no. 1 (1 of 2) of 1912, Records from the Office of the Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi (henceforth DGASIR).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

be prepared and accepted beforehand ‘...which would render it certain that the means will be forthcoming year by year to complete the task irrespective of the value which Mr. Tata may or may not attach to the “finds”.’²⁸ Stein was also unsure whether Tata’s offer was ‘...prompted by genuine interest in Indian history and antiquities, or the rich collector’s ambition to acquire art remains... or perhaps only by the desire, not altogether uncommon among rich Parsis, of making an impression by some “public service” of a novel kind.’²⁹ The search thus ultimately narrowed down on D.B. Spooner as the most suitable candidate to supervise the proposed excavations of Ratan Tata. However, there were other problems to be settled, particularly about the selection of site and disposal of antiquities, before the negotiations could be finalised.

Marshall was still hoping that the moral and material dimensions of Tata’s proposal would ultimately induce the imperial government to offer every encouragement to the private entrepreneur. Besides Taxila, the other city site which was there on the list of top priority for a thorough excavation was Patna. Both these sites, as Marshall evaluated, ‘...are among the most renowned in India...and at both we shall require to undertake a systematic campaign of work extending most probably over a number of years. Government might, therefore, offer to Mr. Tata either of the sites for his enterprise....’³⁰ Marshall estimated the cost of undertaking at Rs 20,000 per year. Regarding the tricky problem about the ultimate disposal of antiquities, Marshall was confident that Mr Tata ‘...would act in a most generous spirit...’³¹ The two main problems that he identified in this connection related to the conflicting custodial claims over the antiquities between the Government in the Archaeological Department, on one hand, and the private entrepreneur, on the other, and the possible clash of interest between the local government involved and Ratan Tata over the destination of the movable antiquities. Marshall admitted that if the antiquities of one particular site are ‘...removed to some distant museum—and still more, [if] it is divided up—it is bound to lose much of its interest—an argument which is likely to be used by the local governments concerned, if we seek to take away the finds to another part of India.’³² The best way out of this quandary, as Marshall saw it, was to communicate to Tata these difficulties and persuade him to reconsider his proposals. The Government, he suggested, might give in to Tata’s demands to retain the finds in his possession, provided ‘...(1) that the collection is maintained intact in India (2) that reasonable access is given for its scientific examination by students (3) that it is eventually bequeathed by him intact to the Government. At the same time we might point out the importance of

²⁸ Letter of M.A. Stein to John H. Marshall of 28 March 1912, no. 1 (1 of 2) of 1912, DGASIR.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Letter of John Marshall to H. Butler of 15 April 1912, no. 1 (1 of 2) of 1912, DGASIR.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

keeping a collection such as is likely to be made at Pataliputra or Taxila at the site itself and suggest that he may eventually be willing to erect a local museum on the spot....³³

The proposals were communicated to Tata without delay. He refused to give in to the suggestion of building site museums in Taxila or Patna to house the antiquities on the sites. Instead, he seemed more inclined to accept Marshall's revised proposals to house the antiquities intact in the new Prince of Wales Museum in Bombay, to give open access to scholars for its scientific study and to, ultimately, bequeath the collection to the Government after his death. Tata was still hopeful that the imperial government would ultimately use their influence over the local government to help him fund the excavations at Taxila. Though he was willing to explore both Taxila and Pataliputra, Taxila remained a higher priority for Tata, and Marshall's description about the proposed wealth of Greco-Buddhist sculptures to be unearthed at Taxila fired him suitably. Pataliputra with its grand remains of Asoka's palaces and the possibility of unearthing 'massive architectural carvings in the Perso-Hellenistic style, and... records of the Mauryan dynasty...' inscribed in architectural and sculptural remains provided equally tempting bait.³⁴ Letters were sent out from the Education Department, Government of India to the local governments of Punjab and Bihar and Orissa, stressing the importance of encouraging private effort to settle the negotiations for the undertaking. As apprehended, Sir Louis Dane, the then Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, refused outright to give in to Tata's proposals to cart away the Taxila antiquities to Bombay. The imperial government refused to push the concerned local governments and, instead, thought it prudent to suspend the whole project '...as the susceptibilities of the Local Governments might be aroused'.³⁵ However, the positive response from the Government of Bihar and Orissa saved the project from being scrapped. Sir Charles Bayley, the first Lieutenant Governor of the newly configured province of Bihar and Orissa, became passionately attached to the project and agreed to provide all necessary assistance for the undertaking.³⁶ Taxila, thus, slipped out of Tata's hand once and for all, and Tata was forced to concentrate only on Pataliputra. Even the otherwise-generous offer of Bihar and Orissa was not unconditional. In fact, in agreeing to give in to Tata's proposal, the Local Government of Bihar and Orissa hoped to ultimately persuade Tata to '...the retention of the collection of finds at

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Letter of John Marshall to L. Porter and Maharaj Singh of the Department of Education, Government of India of 14 July 1912, no. 1 (1 of 2) of 1912, DGASIR.

³⁵ Letter of L. Porter to H. Butler of 6 August 1912, no. 1 (1 of 2) of 1912, DGASIR.

³⁶ Bayley, in fact, emerged as one of the most influential patrons for carving out a distinct historical identity for the newly configured province of Bihar and Orissa. He became the first President of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society [established in 1915], which emerged as a major forum for the construction of a distinct regional historical identity for Bihar and Orissa.

Patna or at least to its removal thither when it reverts to Government.³⁷ But neither Marshall nor the imperial government thought it prudent to push Tata on this point at the moment. Marshall suggested that the local government could appeal to Tata's generosity to plead a case for retaining the finds in Patna once the excavations had commenced.

The final terms agreed upon between Tata and the Government of India in 1913 ran as follows:

(1) that the collection of finds would be maintained intact in Bombay, or if Mr. Tata agrees, in Patna; (2) that Mr. Tata will consider specially the case of any particular object which local reasons may render it inconvenient or inexpedient to remove; (3) that reasonable access will be given for the scientific examination of the collection by students; (4) that the collection will eventually be bequeathed by him intact to the Government for the use and benefit of the public and Mr. Tata's name connected with it; (5) that any duplicate which can be spared from the main collection without any detriment to its value and interest will be made over to Mr. Tata to dispose of as he thinks fit. The selection of such duplicates will rest with the Director General of Archaeology in India.³⁸

Excavating Patna: Unearthing Pataliputra?

The excavations, however, started even before the final round of negotiations between Tata and the imperial government was over. A particular turn of events in Patna resulted in the early beginnings of the Pataliputra excavations. Back in Patna towards the end of 1912, we find Spooner negotiating the finer points of the proposed excavations with the Commissioner of Patna and H. Le Mesurier, the then Secretary to the Government of Bihar and Orissa. The geographical location of Patna at the junction of major rivers endows the city with a high subsoil water level, particularly after monsoon. The high subsoil water level was (and still is) a major hindrance to carry out sustained deep digging.³⁹ In 1912, however, the monsoon failed leading to a near drought-like situation in Patna.⁴⁰ Spooner sent an urgent telegram followed by a letter to Marshall urging for an early beginning of

³⁷ Letter of Marshall to Maharaj Singh of the Department of Education of 9 January 1913, no. 300 (1) of October 1912, DGASIR.

³⁸ Communiqué signed by L.C. Porter, Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Education, Delhi, 25 February 1913, no. 10 (III) of 1919, DGASIR.

³⁹ Waddell's and Mukharji's excavations in the 1890s and early 1900 had already underlined the necessity of such deep digging, up to 15 to 20 feet, at Patna to uncover the Mauryan remains.

⁴⁰ In his *Report* of 1903, Waddell had indeed suggested, keeping in mind the high cost involved in such deep digging, that the Government as a prospective famine relief operation could carry out the future excavations at Patna. Patna was confronted with such a near famine-like situation in 1912 due to the failure of the monsoon and the consequent sharp drop in the subsoil water table.

excavations, initially with Department's funds, to make '...the utmost of the opportunity afforded...by this otherwise disastrous monsoon.'⁴¹ Marshall consented and communicated the arrangement to Ratan Tata assuring him that all antiquities would be treated according to the terms to be ultimately settled upon between Tata and the Government.⁴² Along with Spooner, he also used his personal persuasive skills with the local government, stressing the historical importance of the treasures waiting to be unearthed and the moral and material dimensions of Tata's generous proposals for an early beginning. And following Waddell and Mukharji, Marshall and Spooner identified Kumrahar and Bulandi Bagh as the most promising sites for Mauryan Pataliputra, particularly the grand palace compound of Asoka.⁴³ Hurried negotiations with the local government occupied the whole of December and the excavations finally began with the Departmental fund of Rs 5,000 on 6 January 1913 at the site of Kumrahar under the supervision of D.B. Spooner.

David Brainerd Spooner (1879–1925) was the first American scholar to work in the Archaeological Department of colonial India. He was trained in textual (philological) Indology at Stanford University. Before coming to India, Spooner taught in Japan first at the Prefectural College of Omi at Oatsu and later at the School of Foreign languages, Tokyo, and then at the Imperial University. Between 1901 and 1903, Spooner attended the British Government College and the Sanskrit College in Benares. He was later granted a fellowship by Harvard and was awarded a doctoral degree by King Frederick William University, Berlin, 1906. Spooner joined the Archaeological Department under Marshall. He began his career in the Survey as Superintendent, Frontier Circle, in 1906, excavating Buddhist sites at Sahri-Bahlol and in 1907 at the nearby Takht-i-Bahi. At Shah-ji-ki-Dheri, he discovered the Kanishka reliquary. With the impending excavations at Patna, Spooner was appointed as the Superintendent of the Eastern Circle of the ASI. Besides Patna, Spooner also excavated Basarh (Vaisali) and Nalanda in this capacity. In addition to his field and circle supervisory work, he often assumed administrative and editorial duties for the ASI. In 1919, he was appointed Deputy Director General.⁴⁴

During his explorations of 1890s and early 1900, Waddell had unearthed in Kumrahar fragments of polished stone pillar. He ascribed these fragments to a

⁴¹ Letter of D.B. Spooner to John H. Marshall of 12 November 1912, no. 300 (1) of 1912, DGASIR. Also see Spooner's telegram to Marshall of 12 November, 1912, *ibid.*

⁴² Telegram from John Marshall to Ratan Tata of 7 December 1912, no. 300 (1) of 1912, DGASIR.

⁴³ Letter of D.B. Spooner to the Commissioner of Patna Division, Bankipore, dated, 20 November 1912, and letter of John Marshall to Mr Le Mesurier, Secretary to the Government of Bihar and Orissa, dated, 12 December 1912, no. 300 (1) of 1912, DGASIR.

⁴⁴ For a biographical sketch of D.B. Spooner see Mary Stewart's article 'Iranian Cultural Impact: The Persepolitan Legacy in India', in *The Circle of Ancient Iranian Studies*, http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Architecture/persepolitan_legacy_patna_india.htm (accessed on 3 August 2008] and *Guide to David Brainerd Spooner Papers, 1899–1925*.

pillar of Mauryan antiquity and following the itinerary records of the Chinese pilgrims Faxian and Xuanzang, Waddell took these fragments to be part of the famous inscribed Nili pillar that Asoka had set up in his palace compound. In opening up Kumrahar in January 1913, Spooner began with the ambition of locating the missing fragments; particularly the inscribed part which he hoped would reveal the authentic historical record of the Mauryas and fix once and for all the exact location of Asoka's fabled palace compound. Excavating the high ground between Kallu Pokhra and Chaman Talao, Spooner and his native assistant, Babu Hari Das Dutta, first came across a series of brick walls at a depth of nine to ten feet below the ground level. Spooner ascribed these walls to the Gupta antiquity and acknowledged their importance as scientific historical evidence. However, the priorities at Patna had already been decided upon, and leaving these ancient walls exposed and dismantling them in certain cases, Spooner pushed down, anxious to reach the level of Mauryan Pataliputra. The course of action, as Spooner himself admitted, was not the most scientifically sound one. But facts had to be produced on the ground of twentieth century Patna in support of the grand remains of Mauryan Pataliputra. The final agreement had not yet been settled with Ratan Tata and the Department was anxious to show spectacular results to get the millionaire to fund the excavations on a lavish scale.⁴⁵

Pushing for the true Mauryan level, Spooner came across a large number of pillar fragments on a thick ash stratum. For Spooner, as for several other archaeologists of his day, the polish on these pillars bore authentic evidence of their Mauryan craftsmanship. This was the major Mauryan find of the first season. However, the very abundance of the pillar fragments and the difference of their texture and colour and their small diameter clearly revealed that the fragments did not come from one particular pillar, edict pillar, as Waddell had anticipated. With all facts on the ground militating against the Nili column theory, the search for the fabulous pillar was abandoned. Trial pits were dug in all directions in search of the lost pedestals of the Mauryan pillars. However, these trenches revealed further polished pillar fragments. In fact, the abundance of mutilated pillars appeared to Spooner as puzzling problem. And then on the morning of 7 February 1913, the ruins revealed before Spooner a definite plan. The measurements between the pillar fragments showed that the pillars were equidistant. Taking these distances, by the evening of 7th, Spooner located five parallel rows of monolithic columns with at

⁴⁵ The dismantling of the Gupta level during Pataliputra excavations to reach for the Mauryan level in fact points to the pre-determined nature of 'facts' and 'evidence' in scientific archaeological practice. Abu El-Haj makes a similar case in Israeli Archaeology where she points out how bulldozers were used in archaeological operations in Israel to dismantle the upper 'Arab' levels of occupation and to reach the true 'Jewish' level. Producing the Jewish antiquity of Israel through archaeological practices was central to the politics of the Israeli state's self-fashioning project and it involved a complete erasure of the Arab histories of the land. See, Nadia Abu El-Haj, 'Translating Truths', pp. 166–88, and her book *Facts on the Ground*.

least six pillars in each row. From the strength of accumulating evidence, Spooner concluded that ‘...the northern half of the Kumrahar site marked the position of a mighty pillared hall of Mauryan date, and thus the first structural building of the Mauryan period to be located in India, was no longer a hypothesis but an established fact.’⁴⁶

Within a couple of days from 7 February 1913, Spooner was confident that that the structure he had at hand at Kumrahar was no ordinary building of Mauryan antiquity. From the evidence of equidistant pillar fragments and other minor finds like parts of a Triratna slab, bits of Buddhist rails and a defaced Buddha head, Spooner conjured that the building at Kumrahar:

...is probably part of an Asokan monastery, presumably the so-called “Hall of Conference”; and possibly...the very hall in which Asoka’s Council was held? ...I should infer that the extent must have been either 7 rows of 14 columns each, or...5 rows of 10 columns each...this is of course merely hypothetical. But just imagine the possibilities, in either case, with a separate Asokan stone capital for each of all the columns!’⁴⁷

Marshall wasted no time in communicating to the prospective patron the news of this epoch-making discovery at Patna. Lured by the prospects of an ancient palace with its movable antiquities waiting to be unearthed and assured of good returns of his investment, Tata finally committed himself to the project sending a cheque of rupees 15,000 as an advance for the expenses of the first season. With the funds finally coming in, Marshall sent an urgent reminder to Spooner—‘If any notices on your work are communicated by you to the Press, please take care that Mr. Tata’s name is kept well to the fore. The excavations must be regarded as his from the start.’⁴⁸ The excavations at Patna thus became the *Pataliputra Excavations of Mr. Ratan Tata* and every subsequent publication on the excavations, reports and articles, began with an account of the ‘...princely liberality...’ and public spiritedness of the Parsi millionaire.⁴⁹

Back in Patna in early 1913, Spooner’s excavations at Kumrahar did not, however, reveal the grand palace compound as expected. Instead, the thick ash stratum and the level of silt deposit below this level were made to yield the narrative of

⁴⁶ D.B. Spooner, ‘Mr. Ratan Tata’s Excavations at Pataliputra’, *Archaeological Survey of India Annual Report, 1912–13*, p. 59.

⁴⁷ Letter of D.B. Spooner to John H. Marshall of 10 February 1913, no. 300 (1) of October 1912, DGASIR.

⁴⁸ Letter of John H. Marshall to D.B. Spooner of 16 February 1913, no. 300 (1) of October 1912, DGASIR.

⁴⁹ See, for example, D.B. Spooner’s ‘Mr. Ratan Tata’s Excavations at Pataliputra’, p. 53 and Spooner’s article ‘The Zoroastrian Period of Indian History’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (henceforth *JRAS*), January and July, 1915, pp. 63–89 and pp. 405–55. At the outset of the article, in page 63, Spooner talks of the munificence of Mr Ratan Tata.

the destruction of this grand Mauryan building through flood and fire. Spooner also came across certain equidistant depressions on the ash level and these formed the basis of his theory of sinking of the Mauryan pillars. Deep boring did not reveal any remaining evidence of sinking columns and Spooner argued that the exceptionally soft subsoil of Kumrahar had enveloped these columns once and for all.⁵⁰

Thus, besides the minor antiquities like seals, coins and fragments of sculptures, the only major find of the first season at Kumrahar proved to be a large pillar fragment, which escaped destruction by fire and flood. On the base of the fragment, Spooner found certain masons' marks. These marks reminded him of the of the masons' marks at the ancient Achaemenian monuments referred to by Dieulafoy's famous work *L'Art Antique de la Perse*. From the similarity of these marks, Spooner argued that Persian masons were employed at Kumrahar for building the grand Mauryan Hall. In support of his argument, Spooner drew on an earlier line of archaeological scholarship, which argued for a strong foreign influence in Mauryan art. Spooner particularly drew on Marshall's contention that Asoka must have employed, even if he was not the first to introduce, Greco-Persian masons for building purposes.⁵¹ The evidence of Kumrahar became the authenticating grounds

⁵⁰ On the southern side of this pillared hall Spooner also excavated a row of seven solid wooden platforms of high craftsmanship. In 1913 Spooner was not certain about the exact relation of these platforms to his pillared hall. However, rumour spread like wild fire that the Department that unearthed ancient wooden treasure chests at Kumrahar. Spooner had to seek special police protection to prevent the treasure hunt at the site by unauthorised persons. In fact '... to set at rest the dangerous rumour...' Spooner had to open up one of these platforms to reveal that the logs enclosed only solid mass of earth and not any fabled treasure. See Spooner, 'Mr. Ratan Tata's Excavations at Pataliputra', p. 76.

⁵¹ About the masons' marks on the base of the only pillar excavated in a relatively intact shape at Kumrahar, and about their proximity of form with the masons' marks on the Achaemenid pillars, Spooner went on to elaborate:

The base of [the pillar] itself is carefully smoothed, but of course not polished, and bears a number of interesting symbols and masons' marks.... Among them a set of three rows of three circles is conspicuous, and also the symbol $\overset{\perp}{\circ}$. I am not able to offer any explanation of this symbol, which I believe has long been familiar in India. One point of interest in regard to it may, however, have escaped notice, and that is that very similar marks occur on certain of the Achaemenian monuments of early date. In figures 12 and 13 of part I of Dieulafoy's great work on "*L'Art Antique de la Perse*" (pp. 11 and 12) almost identical symbols are shown from the "*Takhté-Madérè-Soleïman*" and from certain stones at Behistun, the only divergence being in the length of the upright line and in the greater roundness of the base, which in the Achaemenian examples is a true circle. Dieulafoy, from the similarity of the mason's marks in these two places claims (p. 11) that their occurrence on the "*takht*" tends to prove that Persians or Medes were employed on its construction, and a similar argument would seem possible for Kumrahar. It is of course well known that the style of capital employed by Asoka shews very strong Persepolitan influence, and Sir John Marshall holds with reason that Asoka must have employed, even if he was not the first to introduce, Greco-Persian artists or artisans. Would be going too far to claim that this peculiar mason's mark at Kumrahar, slight as it is as evidence,

for the much contended Achaemenian influence in Mauryan art. In fact, the singular absence of similar pillared hall in ancient India like the one at Kumrahar, Spooner argued, forced him to seek a comparable structure in Achaemenid Persia, in the famous Hall of a Hundred Columns at Persepolis. Spooner found a striking similarity in the plan of the two buildings. This, he contended, ‘...would indicate a greater debt on India’s part to Persepolitan civilisation than has hitherto been evidenced...it will...perhaps involve a certain modification of existing theories.’⁵² At the end of the first season, Spooner admitted, ‘...it would be premature to prove that the point has been actually proved.’⁵³ However, the grounds had already been prepared for making Pataliputra Persepolitan.

The favourable weather of the first season did not follow into the subsequent years of the excavations. In 1913, the monsoon returned to normalcy, raising the subsoil water level of Patna and creating hindrances for the excavators. Though the excavations were mostly frustrated during 1913–14, Spooner advanced a great deal on his conjectures. What had been just a proposed hypothesis in 1913 became a point of conviction for Spooner during 1914–15. The similarities between the Achaemenian Hall of Hundred Columns and the Mauryan Hall at Kumrahar unfolded in an ever-increasing number before Spooner. In the intercolumniation and the general design, the two apparently detached buildings revealed strong similarities. The similarity between Achaemenid Persepolis and Mauryan Pataliputra, Spooner argued, was not restricted to the Hall alone. Taking Curzon’s plan of Persepolis, Spooner set out in Kumrahar to prove that there were surviving vestiges of ancient mounds and walls in Pataliputra, marking point by point similarity with the Achaemenian capital.⁵⁴ While, in the first season, Spooner had assigned to the Mauryan Hall Asokan antiquity, in the subsequent reports and letters, he pushed back the antiquity of the Kumrahar structure to the period of Chandragupta, the first Mauryan emperor. The scanty evidence of stones at Kumrahar forced Spooner to the conclusion that the structure at Kumrahar represented an earlier period in Indian architecture when stone was still subservient to wood as the building material.⁵⁵ Thus, Spooner’s conjectures not only tried to authenticate the evidence of Achaemenian influence in Mauryan Pataliputra but also claimed a higher antiquity of foreign influence in Indian art and empire. In fact, for him the

is nevertheless in the line of confirmation of Sir John Marshall’s contention? The prediction of an Achaemenian source for it originally would certainly not be out of harmony with such evidences as do exist in Asokan art and architecture. *Ibid.*, pp. 69–70.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁵⁴ See, George N. Curzon’s chapter ‘Persepolis, and other ruins’ in his book *Persia and the Persian Question*, Vol. II.

⁵⁵ Spooner, in fact, located the palace of Asoka at Kallu Khan’s Bagh in Saddar Gali within the city of Patna. See, Letter of Spooner to John Marshall of 5 May 1915, no. 135 (1 of 6) of 1915, DGASIR.

whole of Pataliputra unfolded as a conscious and active copy of Achaemenid Persepolis by the Mauryan Emperor. Marshall agreed that the points of resemblance between Kumrahar and Persepolis were so striking that ‘...it will be something more than strange if they prove to be the outcome of mere accident.’⁵⁶ However, he remained sceptical. ‘Brilliant and attractive as these theories are,’ he cautioned, ‘it must be borne in mind that the evidence on which they are based is at present very slender and that the explorer himself does not put them forward as anything more than reasonable conjectures.’⁵⁷

The conjectures had to be supported by finds not only for the sake of scientific historical evidence but also to assure the patron good returns for his investment. Tata’s initial ambition of reaping movable antiquities was carried over to Kumrahar from Taxila. And he was pushing really hard for his returns:

The...news from Dr. Spooner in connection with the excavations at Pataliputra is most interesting.... [But] I hope that the nature of excavations this season may be such that some interesting and valuable finds may be made. I should not like to feel that mere spade work was being done at my expense, leaving others at a later period to reap the fruit.⁵⁸

In 1914, Spooner was still hoping to unearth the wealth of sculptures from Kumrahar. However, such statues were never found and the heavy monsoon and rising subsoil water level forced Spooner to abandon the site.

In 1914–15, Spooner went on leave to England and used the time to author his famous article on the Zoroastrian influence in early Indian civilisation. Growing out of the excavations at Patna the article marked a new turn in the colonial fascination with things Mauryan. Back in Patna, Spooner concentrated on Bulandi Bagh during 1915–17. And even Bulandi Bagh failed to yield any such grand sculptural remains.⁵⁹ However, Tata never forgot the priorities of his investment. The conjectured hall of Kumrahar and Spooner’s theory of Parsi beginnings of early Indian civilisation were well appreciated. But the find of ‘...sculptures and other artistic antiquities’ also featured as equally important justification for the continuation of work.⁶⁰ The desired finds were never to be unearthed. In 1918, Ratan Tata passed away and the same year Spooner left Patna to officiate for John Marshall for the summer, never to come back to the site. The high noon of

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁵⁸ Letter of Ratan Tata to John H. Marshall of 13 January 1913, no. 165 (1of 14) of 1914, DGASIR.

⁵⁹ Over the years, Spooner’s excavations at Bulandi Bagh unearthed wooden palisade, which he took to be the wooden palisade of Pataliputra as recorded by Megasthenes and only modest terracotta remains.

⁶⁰ Letter of Ratan Tata to John Marshall of 1 February 1915, no. 135 (1of 6) of 1915, DGASIR.

Pataliputra excavations was thus over. With an investment of more than 60,000 rupees and employing as many as 1,300 labourers during the peak seasons, Pataliputra and its modest Mauryan remains was now laid out for colonial and nationalist scholarly consumption.

Indigeneity of Things Mauryan

The ascription of the material remains unearthed at Pataliputra to Mauryan antiquity was never merely an art historical or for that matter a strictly archaeological problem. The labelling of antiquities as Mauryan, as Tapati Guha-Thakurta rightly argues, brought in its trail ‘the spectre of foreign influences.’⁶¹ The search for Hellenic influence in the art of the imperial Mauryas had served as a powerful tool for Western scholars to deny the autonomy and authenticity of ancient Indian art and civilisation. The Mauryan label had also produced a counter platform for the emerging Indian scholars to refute the authority of the Western predecessors and re-inscribe things Mauryan as essentially Indian.⁶² This section will track the political implications of the Mauryan label as it was played out around the newly recovered remains of Pataliputra. Spooner’s article ‘The Zoroastrian Period of Indian History’⁶³ marked the beginnings of a new wave of debate about the indigeneity of things Mauryan.

The Zoroastrian Period of Indian History: Parsi Lineage of Indian Civilisation

‘The Zoroastrian Period of Indian History’ marked a resurgent quest for uncovering the ethno-religious affiliation of the Mauryas in the archaeological remains of Pataliputra. The article grew directly out of the experience of the excavations at Patna. The lectures at the Royal Asiatic Society, London, and the subsequent article in the Society’s Journal began with Spooner’s summary of the Pataliputra excavation reports from 1913 onwards. Like other archaeologists of his day, Spooner was convinced about the scientificity of his enterprise. The sheer absence of grand extant structural remains at Pataliputra forced Spooner to look for remains of the ethnic and religious affiliation of the Mauryas in the statigraphical indications

⁶¹ See, Guha-Thakurta’s chapter ‘For the Greater Glory of Indian Art: Travels And Travails of a Yakshi’, in her book *Monuments, Objects, Histories*, p. 219.

⁶² The question of foreign influence in Mauryan art had already emerged as one of the prime concerns of art history and archaeology in colonial India. The famous debate between Rajendralala Mitra and James Fergusson had set out in clear terms the political implications of the debate. The debate was carried to Pataliputra by L.A. Waddell who refuted Mitra’s case about the autonomy of ancient Indian art and openly sided with Fergusson in his *Report* of 1903 to argue for a definite Greek influence in the Mauryan art of Pataliputra.

⁶³ Spooner, ‘The Zoroastrian Period of Indian History’.

of the soil. He admitted that such statigraphical evidences ‘...are not easy to observe. They are more difficult to coordinate, and still more to elucidate connectedly. ...[But] The data are at least definite and accurate.’⁶⁴ From the modest evidence of pillar fragments and similar evidence like mason marks, seals, etc., Spooner had conjured a picture of striking architectural and structural similarities between the Mauryan Hall and other excavated buildings of Pataliputra and the Achaemenid buildings of Persepolis. Like in the excavation reports, Spooner argued a case for the deployment of Persian masons by the Mauryan Emperor in Kumrahar. The resemblance between Mauryan Pataliputra and Achaemenian Persepolis confirmed Spooner to conclude ‘...either we had the most extraordinary chapter of accidents known to archaeology or...a conscious Mauryan copy of Persepolis.’⁶⁵ Spooner settled on the latter. And the implications of this conscious Mauryan copy of Persepolis led him to argue a case not merely for definite proof of foreign influence in ancient Indian art but also for a Zoroastrian–Parsi lineage of the Mauryas. The reading of racial, religious and linguistic traces into excavated material evidence informed the mainstream archaeological practices of colonial India. And Spooner was only using time-tested methods to argue a case for the foreign origins of the earliest traceable empire of ancient India. However foolproof Spooner’s statigraphical indications at Pataliputra might be, they could not offer the final grounds for making Pataliputra Persepolis and the Mauryas Parsi. In fact, the constraint of limited evidence in the soil forced Spooner, like other archaeologists before him, back to texts. Much of the article, except for the few opening pages, is an exercise in textual and philological Indology. And here, Spooner’s initial training as a classical philologist and textual Indologist came handy.

Like other archaeologists before him, Spooner first drew on the foreign literary records of Pataliputra—fragments of Megasthenes’s *Indica* and the nineteenth century translations of itinerary accounts of the Chinese pilgrims—Faxian and Xuanzang. Spooner had already assigned the Mauryan complex at Kumrahar to an antiquity of Chandragupta’s period. Pushing for a pre-Asokan antiquity for the unearthed Mauryan structures at Kumrahar, he tried to prove that Asoka’s particular predilection for Greek architects was neither novel nor unique. And that in turning to the West (read Greece) for inspiration, Asoka merely drew on customs prevalent in the dynasty for more than two generations.⁶⁶ Discounting the earlier propositions about the Greek introduction of the art of stone architecture during the reign of Asoka, Spooner pushed forward for an alternative source of foreign influence.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 64–65.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁶⁶ Spooner in fact dwells on the Chinese records, particularly on Faxian’s description of the building of palaces of stones by Asoka, to show that these descriptions related to a later period of Mauryan building activity when the art of stone architecture had reached a certain maturity. The remains of Kumrahar, he inferred, bore the evidence of an earlier period of architecture when wood was still the predominantly favoured building material. See, *Ibid.*, pp. 73–76.

Megasthenes's *Indica* now offered him this alternative and more ancient field—Achaemenid Persepolis. Spooner argued that Megasthenes's account bore direct evidence that Chandragupta's court was organised on predominantly Persian lines. From the Greek account, Spooner now turned to indigenous literary sources—the *Mahabharata*, Patanjali's *Mahabhasya*, Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, Wilson's translation of the famous Sanskrit play *Mudrarakshaha*, the *Vedas* and *Puranas* for traces of Parsi origins of the Mauryas. This shift from foreign to indigenous literary sources also marked the beginnings of a reevaluation of the historicity of these records in the colonial archaeological circles.

Hopkins's translation of *Mahabharata*, Great Epic, provided Spooner his first clue for the Persian design of Kumrahar buildings. In the figure of Asura Maya, the fabled superhuman architect of the epic, Spooner traced his Persian mason of Kumrahar. Spooner drew on early Indological scholarship to prove that Asurs in ancient India implied foreign people, alien in race and religion. He drew philological equation between Asura Maya of the *Mahabharata* and Ahura Mazda of the Zoroastrians. And since Chandragupta's imported Persian masons attributed all their building operations to the grace of Ahura Mazda, Spooner argued that later generations of Indians attributed the buildings of Pataliputra to the Asurs and Danavas themselves. The grand description of the cities and palaces built by Maya in the *Mahabharata* now unfolded before Spooner as the ruins of Mauryan Pataliputra at Kumrahar.

From his initial entry point—architect and architecture—Spooner now proceeded to trace the lineage of the royal dynasty. He argued that Chandragupta's particular preference for Persian design and deployment of Persian masons at Pataliputra could only be explained by the fact that the monarch himself was a Parsi. Rejecting the indigenous accounts, which traced the etymological origins of the term Maurya to *Mura*, the alleged low-caste mother of Chandragupta, Spooner set out for an Avestan origin of the term. He acknowledged that it was K.P. Jayaswal who first suggested to him this course of enquiry. Spooner found the etymological roots of Maurya in the Persian term *Mourva*, which he interpreted as implying the inhabitant of Merv or *Mervian*. This Merv was identified by him as the valley of Persepolis on the river Murghab. Spooner argued that Maurya was an '...ethnic or territorial designation, like the Pathan or the Mughal...and not a personal or family name.'⁶⁷ He corroborated this philological equation with numismatic evidence. He argued that the symbols on the punch marked coins bore direct traces of the Mauryan descent from Achaemenian Persepolis. Spooner thus concluded that in the wake of Alexander's invasion of India, Chandragupta came with a Persian army from the West to conquer Magadha and set up the first empire of ancient India. To strengthen his point, Spooner also tried to prove that

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 415.

Kautilya, the royal chancellor of Chandragupta, was a Zoroastrian Magi. In Chanakya's *Arthashastra*, Spooner found strong traces of Magian rites.⁶⁸ Spooner did not rest by painting Mauryas and all contemporary figures Parsi. He pushed for a greater antiquity of the Persepolitan legacy in India—to the empire of the Nandas and further back to the antiquity of Buddha, to the age of the early republics or Mahajanapadas and the earliest Saissunaka kingdom of Magadha.

Spooner's search for a greater antiquity of Parsi lineage ultimately culminated with making Buddha Zoroastrian. He found striking similarities between Zoroaster's and Buddha's birth stories. From the evidence of Gandhara Buddhist sculptures, Spooner concluded that these narratives had travelled from Persepolis to India rather than the other way round.⁶⁹ He traced the etymological roots of Buddha's epithet *Sakya Muni* to the Scythians. These Scythians, Spooner argued, belonged to the ruling class, Iranian in race and Zoroastrian in belief. And Sakya, he pushed, was not Buddha's family name, but an ethnological indicator of the lineage of the Iranian Sage. In reforming the faith, Spooner concluded, Buddha adopted the Magian faith to the Indian conditions. Rather than a move away from Brahminical Hinduism, Buddhism unfolded before Spooner as a narrative of spiritual acclimatisation of a section of the domiciled Iranians, as a process of Hinduising of the Parsi cult.⁷⁰ In turning to Buddhism, a cult of Parsi origin which united the Magian and Hindus in India in one common fold, Asoka, Spooner concluded, conquered the religious heart of the empire in which his forefathers ruled as alien by affecting a spiritual compromise between the rulers and the ruled.⁷¹ The Mauryas remained Parsis and Pataliputra Persepolitan, only sufficiently indigenised.

Pushing for a pre-Mauryan antiquity of Persian influence on India, Spooner inferred that by the time Chandragupta ascended the throne of Magadha, '...the Persian element in the Indian society had become so completely domiciled and so identified with the community that they were not looked upon as aliens in our modern sense.'⁷² Chandragupta remained a Parsi but his relation to other contemporary Indians '...was precisely that of the modern Parsis to the Indian population of the present time.... [T]he modern Parsis despite the closeness of their community, are legally described as "natives of India" to-day.'⁷³ In Chandragupta, Spooner traced the glorious lineage of his modern Parsi patron, Ratan Tata. The imperial vision of Chandragupta had led to the execution of the grand Kumrahar complex

⁶⁸ Spooner, in fact, argued that the whole of *Arthashastra*, *Atharva Veda* and *Vishnu Purana* betrayed strong Zoroastrian–Parsi influence. See, *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ In his earlier ASI reports and his *Handbook to the Sculptures in the Peshawar Museum*, Spooner had already suggested the evidence of Persian influences on Gandhara sculptures.

⁷⁰ 'The Zoroastrian Period of Indian History', pp. 454–55.

⁷¹ Spooner drew parallels between Asoka's religious compromise and Akbar's *Din i-Ilahi* and concluded that Buddhism was Sikhism of ancient India.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 430.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 429–30.

in distant antiquity. The ‘princely munificence’ of Tata now led to the recovery of its remains in the early twentieth century. In his obituary of Spooner, E.A. Horne argued that the archaeologist remained unperturbed by ‘...the vulgar legend that since [the Parsi] Sir Ratan Tata had found the money for the Pataliputra excavations, it was merely a commercial *quid pro quo* to ascribe the glories of Chandragupta and his capital to the Parsis [*sic*] of old.’⁷⁴ However, we have already seen how Tata bargained and influenced in deciding the priorities at Kumrahar. And the spectre of Parsi lineage of Mauryan Pataliputra, as we shall see later, continued to haunt Spooner even after Tata’s death and never merely as an academic problem.⁷⁵

The Indianness of Mauryan Empire

Published in 1915 when the Pataliputra excavations were still in their peak, Spooner’s article took the antiquarian circles in India and London by storm. Both Western and Indian scholars—archaeologists, Indologists and Iranian specialists alike set out to counter the traces of Parsi–Zoroastrianism in Mauryan remains of Patna. Central to all these debates remained the question of indigeneity of things Mauryan. Much of what Spooner did can now simply be written off as bad archaeology. However, this is not a label that is entertained here. Instead, I propose to tease out how the claims of indigeneity around Pataliputra were deeply imbricated in the politics of nationalism in colonial India.

To start with Spooner’s own words; ‘As it quickly transpired, this thesis offended Indian patriotism...’⁷⁶ Berriedale Keith, the distinguished professor of Sanskrit at Edinburgh fired the opening shots. He came out, to put it in Spooner’s own words, ‘...with one of his characteristically hammer-and-tongs onslaughts, and declared in ringing accents that Dr. Spooner was not only a fool but a knave.’⁷⁷ Keith was caustic and dismissive about the scientificity of Spooner’s project. In his review of Spooner’s article, Keith argued:

The only conclusion to be drawn from the evidence is clear. Iran [*sic*] may and no doubt did lend India ideas of various kinds; in each case these must be carefully looked for and examined, and ascribed to Iran only if another and Indian origin is not possible and natural. A Zoroastrian period of Indian history never existed, nor indeed was any such existence to be expected.... It is clear that the equation of the Mauryan palace and the palace of Darius rests on

⁷⁴ E.A. Horne, ‘D.B. Spooner (1879–1925),’ *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, pp. clxii–iii, 1926.

⁷⁵ During an informal discussion, Dr Nayanjot Lahiri also suggested to me that Tata’s patronage of the Pataliputra excavations was one of the reasons behind Spooner’s thesis about the Parsi lineage of the Mauryas.

⁷⁶ Letter of D.B. Spooner to J.A. Page of 10 March 1922, no. 10 (III) of 1919, DGASIR.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

wholly insufficient evidence on the archaeological side. There is not ‘a priori’ reason to deny its possibility, but it must be established by archaeology, not by such evidence as adduced by Dr. Spooner.⁷⁸

Keith’s dismissal of Spooner’s thesis opened the floodgates of criticism from Western scholars. Several scholars within the Archaeological Department, including the Director–General, doubted the soundness of Spooner’s conclusions. Marshall who had been one of Spooner’s strongest supports through out excavations appeared sceptical about Spooner’s revolutionary conclusions. He warned that Spooner’s ideas were bound to provoke criticism.⁷⁹ Spooner’s thesis soon came under attack from scholars across different fields who questioned the scientificity of his project. Even Horne, who spoke in glowing terms about Spooner in his obituary, admitted that the article appeared ‘somewhat prematurely’.⁸⁰ Weighed down by criticism from his Western peers, Spooner was still hopeful about the acceptability of his thesis. In January 1916, we find him writing to Marshall a self-congratulatory note where he cites the several specialists across disciplines supporting various portions of his thesis.⁸¹ However, Spooner was never able to garner this general acceptability for his thesis. Instead, the criticisms of his Western peers encouraged the Indian scholars, as Spooner put it, to open ‘...the flood gates theretofore pent up, and the Niagara of Indian journalism passed over me.’⁸²

On 7 March 1915, a ‘Bankipore correspondent’ of the *Bengalee* published an article in the newspaper titled *The Pataliputra Excavations and Bengalee Archaeologists*. The article argued for a reappraisal of Indian/Hindu literary sources—the Mahabharata and the Puranas—as historical records. These indigenous textual sources had also served as Spooner’s prime evidence in making Pataliputra Persepolitan and Mauryas Parsis. The ‘Bankipore correspondent’ thus argued that Spooner’s rendering of these records were faulty and his ‘a priori’ search for foreign influence in ancient Indian civilisation had led Spooner to sully the past of India by attributing a foreign lineage to its earliest traceable empire. Spooner’s thesis unfolded before the writer as a ploy to deny the originality of India’s ancient

⁷⁸ A.B. Keith, ‘The Zoroastrian Period of Indian History’, *JRAS*, 1916, pp. 142–43.

⁷⁹ In fact, among the files in the record room of the Office of the Director General of Archaeology, New Delhi, file no. 60 (1 of 6) of 1916 is wholly devoted to the subject ‘Criticisms on the Zoroastrian Period of Indian History by D.B. Spooner...’ This file contains several correspondences between Spooner, Bhandarkar, Vincent Smith and Vogel on their criticisms of Spooner’s thesis.

⁸⁰ Horne, ‘D.B. Spooner (1879–1925)’, p. clxii.

⁸¹ ‘Nobody has sufficient familiarity with all the multifarious fields which were necessarily touched upon in my article to give sweeping approbation as specialists to the whole thing.... [But] where scholars support me severally in their own subjects, [does this not] result in a general acceptance?’ See, Letter of Spooner to Marshall of 20 January 1916, no. 60 (1 of 6) of 1916, DGASIR.

⁸² Letter of Spooner to Page of 10 March 1922, no. 10 (III) of 1919, DGASIR.

past in the colonised present. And the use of indigenous literary sources in this ploy was tantamount to sacrilege.⁸³

Shocked at this journalistic outburst, Spooner decided to show the ‘...public in Bengal...’ the academic problem his thesis was hinging at.⁸⁴ In his response of 11 March 1916, Spooner argued that his real intension had never been to sully the greatness of ancient Indian civilisation. His use of indigenous textual sources, Spooner argued, had shown sufficiently that he was more responsive to the historical value of Indian textual sources than many of his Western peers. And in advancing the theory of the Parsi lineage of the Mauryas, Spooner argued, he was only proposing what these sources indicated. He urged passionately that this was not a ploy to deny the autonomy of ancient Indian civilisation but an attempt to prove how Hinduism as a great civilising and unifying force ultimately indigenised this seemingly foreign influence in ancient India.⁸⁵ Spooner’s strong disclaimers notwithstanding, his use of indigenous textual sources in tracing a foreign lineage of the Mauryas would come under severe attack, this time from an old friend, K.P. Jayaswal.⁸⁶

In his review of Spooner’s article, Jayaswal, who had been quoted by Spooner in support of his argument about the Parsi lineage of the Mauryas and Nandas, seemed anxious to distance himself from the project. Jayaswal’s critique of Spooner’s findings was also based on the same methods of reading ‘a priori’ histories of racial, linguistic and religious identities into philological and literary and excavated material evidences. His review concentrated on the alleged Parsi origins of Chandragupta, the Nandas and the Zoroastrian affiliations of Chanakya. From archaeological, religious and philological evidence, he tried to recover an essentially Indian, particularly a Hindu Brahminical lineage for the Mauryan Empire.⁸⁷

Jayaswal dismissed the archaeological and architectural evidence in support of the alleged Parsi lineage of the Mauryas without much deliberation. ‘Being on the spot I have had the opportunity to follow the progress of Kumrahar excavations. I do not think that the learned archaeologist has succeeded in proving that the excavated site represents Chandragupta’s palaces. On a closer search the

⁸³ See, ‘The Pataliputra Excavations and Bengalee Archaeologists’, *The Bengalee*, 7 March, 1916.

⁸⁴ Letter of Spooner to Marshall of 21 March 1916, no. 60 (1 of 6) of 1916, DGASIR.

⁸⁵ Spooner, ‘Correspondence: The Pataliputra Excavations and the Bengalee Archaeologists’, *The Bengalee*, 11 March 1916.

⁸⁶ Kashi Prasad Jayaswal is a typical illustration of the new generation of amateur Indian archaeologists who participated actively in the new non-official regional antiquarian societies of colonial India. A barrister by training, he was one of the founding figures of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society (1915), an active member of the newly established Provincial Museum of Patna (1917) and a prolific author of numerous historical and archaeological articles.

⁸⁷ K.P. Jayaswal, ‘The Zoroastrian Period of Indian History’, *JBORS*, Vol. 2 (I), 1916, pp. 97–104.

Persepolitan picture disappears from Kumrahar.⁸⁸ However, the main focus of Jayaswal's attack was the textual and philological section of Spooner's thesis, more so because his own name was connected with this particular section.

Spooner's use of indigenous textual sources, particularly his search for a Parsi-Zoroastrian lineage of *Atharva Veda*, his search for Parsi lineage of the Mauryas in *Mahabharata* and the *Arthashastra* are dismissed by Jayaswal outright as they '...do not stand a chance of obtaining a considerable hearing at the hands of the specialists...'⁸⁹ The eye of the storm now centred on the question of Chandragupta's nationality.

Here, Jayaswal dismissed not only Spooner's rendering of the indigenous textual sources but also countered his interpretation of the Greek accounts. Jayaswal alleged that in his quest for a predetermined Parsi lineage of the Mauryas, Spooner had mixed up Herodotus's account of Persia with Strabo's account of India '...to give a piece of history that would not be faithful to fact.'⁹⁰ And to argue for a Parsi lineage of the Mauryas on the basis of that history, is '...rather reckless'.⁹¹

Jayaswal agreed that the equation between Maurya and Mourva (the Avestan root), which he himself had suggested to Spooner, was flawless on philological grounds. But there is no evidence in support of Spooner's thesis that in fourth century B.C. Persepolis was called Mourva and that it was the ancestral land of the Mauryas. He argued that the earliest reference to Mauryas as *Muriya* is found in the Hathigumpha inscription near Bhubaneswar in Orissa. This *Muriya*, he pushed, could only be traced in the Sanskrit name *Mura*, the low-caste Hindu mother of Chandragupta of the Sanskrit literary sources. *Muriya* dislodged *Mourva*, reinscribing the indigeneity of the first Indian emperor and Jayaswal concluded, 'The Zoroastrian Period of Indian History appears to be a mere castle-in-the-air.'⁹²

Within a few months of the publication of Jayaswal's dismissive review, Spooner was faced with another, most scathing and polemical criticism. Authored under the pen name Nimrod, this review amounted to a complete dismissal of Spooner's thesis.⁹³ The review started off on a rather caustic note about Spooner's accolades as an archaeologist and about the '...new vista of research and speculation' that the proposed Zoroastrian period of Indian history brought in its trail.⁹⁴ However, the thrust of the review was on dismissing what Spooner had speculated without scientific evidence to substantiate his claims. Dismissing Spooner's rendering of the indigenous textual accounts in support of the Parsi lineage of the Mauryas

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁹³ Nimrod, 'The Zoroastrian Period of Indian History', *Modern Review*, Vol. 19, April, May and June, pp. 372-76, 490-98 and 597-601.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 372-73.

and the Zoroastrian ancestry of Buddha as fallacious and unscientific, the article mainly concentrated on the evidence unearthed during archaeological excavations at Kumrahar, Spooner's initial entry point. In doing so, Nimrod hinted that Spooner had manipulated facts on the ground to conjure a picture of grand Mauryan architectural splendour and had read 'a priori' history of foreign influence and lineage into modest stone and wooden fragments. Nimrod's critique was pegged on the same scientificity of stratigraphical evidence that Spooner had used to support his thesis. Stratigraphical evidence, Nimrod consented, was a scientific but rather difficult ground to build a connected historical narrative of a site. And '...the glamour of Asoka's name and his ancient capital' Nimrod accused, 'added to personal enthusiasm carried to excess have affected the judgement of the unemotional archaeologist.'⁹⁵ For Nimrod, the equidistant pillar fragments at Kumrahar did not point to any resemblance of plan with the Hall of Hundred Columns at Achaemenian Persepolis. Nimrod held that the fragments were merely piled up by later generations of relic hunters or by the archaeologist himself to fit his 'a priori' search for Parsi traces in Mauryan Pataliputra. He argued that among the ruins of Pataliputra there was no scientific evidence to prove that ancient Indian architecture of stone sculpture owed its beginnings to foreign, particularly Perso-Hellenic influence. And in arguing for such influence, Spooner was merely riding on the back of other Western scholars like Marshall who attributed every single trace of ancient Indian art to foreign (read Western) craftsmanship.⁹⁶ The whole of Pataliputra excavations now unfolded before Nimrod as a lavishly financed ploy to deny the autonomy of ancient Indian civilisation in her colonised present. Spooner's omission of P.C. Mukharji's name in the list of early excavators at Pataliputra was also used by Nimrod to strengthen his point. Not only was India's ancient past rendered alien but the contributions of an Indian archaeologist in the site was sufficiently marginalised and the entire project was coloured Western in the name of science. Nimrod thus concluded, 'The excavations at Pataliputra have failed. They have failed to produce any important result.... If our criticism is challenged, we shall always be ready to substantiate our statements with further corroborative evidences.'⁹⁷ The voice of the Indian scholars within and outside the Archaeological Department could no longer be silenced and pushed to the margin. The Western pioneers were faced with real threat of dispossession in a field of study they themselves had inaugurated.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 376.

⁹⁶ Nimrod in fact pushed for a greater antiquity and indigeneity of the structure unearthed at Kumrahar, to the period of the early Saissunaka emperors of Magadha.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 490 and p. 601.

⁹⁸ The only Indian archaeologist who seemed willing to give a consideration to Spooner's search for Persepolitan influence in Pataliputra was Rakhil Das Banerji. In a Bengali article, '*Pataliputra: Prachin Kahini*', published in the Bengali periodical *Bharatbarsha* in 1914, Banerji seemed open to Spooner's suggestion of Persian influence in the unearthed structures of Kumrahar. However, we have no response of Banerji to Spooner's thesis after the publication of the article in 1915.

Shocked at this polemical outburst, one of the first to get back to Spooner was the modern Parsi patron of Pataliputra. Tata had been generally encouraging, if not overtly involved, in Spooner's thesis about the Parsi origins of Indian civilisation. In a letter to Spooner of 8 August 1916, Tata urged the archaeologist to give a fitting reply to Nimrod. 'I think you will not, and cannot, sit quiet under these circumstances and I shall be anxious to know what answer you think necessary to give to these criticisms. If your answer appears, I think it must, in a public journal, I shall be glad if you will kindly inform me of its appearance.'⁹⁹ Spooner, however, thought it neither '...necessary [n]or desirable to reply to an anonymous writer whose general tone appeared to me neither sufficiently scholarly, or sufficiently gentlemanly to deserve such an answer.'¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, he drafted a reply and sent it to Marshall for his approval. But like Spooner, Marshall was equally anxious to avoid any further controversy or mud singling, especially since his own name and that of the Department was intricately linked with it. He probably did not approve of another round of war of words and Spooner's reply to Nimrod was never made public.¹⁰¹

Inhabiting a Place–World: Pataliputra in Bihar

A 'Place–world', as Sumathi Ramaswamy argues following Edward S. Casey and Keith Basso, is '...a particular universe of objects and events...wherein portions of the past are brought into being...' through the power of imagination, politics of narration and acts of Place-making.¹⁰² Ramaswamy also makes the case for a certain difference between a 'place–world' and an available physical place in terms of their imaginative (and productive) potentials. In the foregoing account, we have seen how Pataliputra was brought into being through the place-making labours of colonial archaeology. An integral part of the archaeological production of Pataliputra was designed to endow this place–world with a tangible physicality, to serve this 'place–world' as a pre-existing, physically available place. The transfer of Pataliputra antiquities to the Patna Museum and reclamation of Pataliputra as

⁹⁹ Letter of Ratan Tata to D.B. Spooner of 8 August 1916, no. 60 (1 of 6) of 1916, DGASIR.

¹⁰⁰ Letter of D.B. Spooner to John Marshall of 13 August 1916, no. 60 (1 of 6) of 1916, DGASIR.

¹⁰¹ In fact, Spooner's draft does not appear even in the unpublished files of the Office of Director General of Archaeology, New Delhi. However, faced with a volley of criticism, Spooner would be ultimately forced to revise his work substantially. In a letter to J.A. Page of 10 March 1922, Spooner was still defending the archaeological part of his thesis. However, he acknowledged that his philological and literary arguments in support of the Zoroastrian–Parsi lineage of the Mauryas, Nandas and the Sakyas were not foolproof. He was revising this part and planning to publish it as a book. See Letter of D.B. Spooner to J.A. Page of 10 March 1922, no. 10 (III) of 1919, DGASIR. Horne in his obituary of Spooner recalled that Spooner was now more inclined to replace the term Zoroastrian Period with 'Magian Period'.

¹⁰² See Ramaswamy, *Fabulous Geographies, Catastrophic Histories*, p. 4; Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, p. 6; Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place* and Casey's essay 'Between Geography and Philosophy: What does it Mean to be in the Place-World?', pp. 683–93.

the site of ancient provincial glories was the final attempt to reinscribe this 'place-world' as an inhabited physical place.

Sir Ratan Tata's untimely death in 1918 provided the local government of Bihar and Orissa an opportunity to work out a scheme to reclaim the Pataliputra antiquities as the historical heritage of the newly configured province. The Government of Bihar and Orissa had always favoured the retention of Pataliputra antiquities in Patna itself. And the establishment of the Patna Museum in 1917 to preserve the antiquities of the province within the territorial limits of the province itself made their case stronger. Within a few months of Tata's death, the Secretary, Department of Education, Government of Bihar and Orissa, sent an urgent note to the Secretary, Department of Education, Government of India reminding the imperial government that since the Pataliputra antiquities had now reverted to the Government of India after Tata's death according to the agreement, '...the Lieutenant Governor in Council [of Bihar and Orissa] therefore proposes that it should now be transferred to the Patna Museum, where it will be kept in a special section associated with Sir Ratan Tata's name.'¹⁰³ Spooner, who was then officiating for Marshall as the Director General of Archaeology, agreed that after Tata's death the imperial government could dispose of the Pataliputra antiquities in the best possible way. Agreeing with the Government of Bihar and Orissa, he argued that if the collection was transferred to Bombay '...considerable local feeling will be aroused in Behar and that the local Government, who are interested in the matter as having acquired the land for excavation, will be certainly disappointed.'¹⁰⁴ Spooner also advanced a purely scientific archaeological interest for the retention of Pataliputra antiquities in Patna. He feared that once the antiquities left site they would be '...deprived of much of their meaning...' more particularly so since the collection was not yet complete.¹⁰⁵ Marshall supported the proposal, particularly the argument about the scientific value of retaining antiquities in or near the site itself. And the imperial government directed him to reach an amicable understanding with Lady Tata balancing the various interests concerned.¹⁰⁶ The ultimate retention of the Pataliputra antiquities in the Patna Museum, as we shall see, involved a protracted negotiation between the imperial Government in the Archaeological Department, the provincial Government of Bihar and Orissa and the Executors of Tata's Will. In these bargains, the scientific archaeological arguments actually took a back seat with other priorities ruling the settlement.

¹⁰³ Letter of the Secretary to the Government of Bihar and Orissa, Department of Education, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Education of 29 December 1918, no. 10 (III) of 1919, DGASIR.

¹⁰⁴ Letter of the Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Education, to Sir Malcolm Seton, Secretary to the Judicial and Public Department, India Office, London of 5 June 1919, no. 10 (III) of 1919, DGASIR.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

Addressing the imperial Government within a few weeks after the proposal of the Bihar and Orissa Government was communicated to him, A.J. Bilimoria, the solicitor to Lady Tata and one of the co-executors of Ratan Tata's Will, acknowledged that Tata's Will did not contain any specific instructions for the disposal of the Pataliputra antiquities after his death. However, there were clear instructions that the collections at the Tata House, Bombay, and the York House, England, were to be maintained at the Prince of Wales Museum in Bombay as 'Ratan Tata Art Collection'. Bilimoria reasoned, '...if it would have been possible for Sir Ratan to have given an indication of his intention as regards the disposal of the Pataliputra collection, he would have preferred its location in Bombay.'¹⁰⁷ Referring back to Tata's ultimate agreement with the Government of India in 1913, he pushed that the maintenance of the collection in Patna was '...contingent upon Sir [then Mr.] Ratan Tata's agreement, otherwise it was to be maintained in Bombay.'¹⁰⁸ Pending the ultimate decision of Lady Tata, Bilimoria writing on behalf of the executors of Tata's Will asserted that it was their expressed desire to maintain the collection in Bombay rather than Patna. When communicated, Lady Tata not only vetoed against the retention of the finds in Patna, but also asked for a detailed list of the collection of finds at Pataliputra, anxious not to leave anything behind in the city.¹⁰⁹

Faced with an outright refusal, Marshall tried to negotiate the matter personally with Lady Tata and Bilimoria, arguing the case for retention of Pataliputra antiquities in the name of scientific archaeology and local interests in Bihar and Orissa. But the executors seemed unbendable. On 20 February 1919, Bilimoria reasserted Lady Tata's demand for the antiquity list from Patna, this time to D.B. Spooner.¹¹⁰ Transferred outside Patna and burdened with other official duties, Spooner suggested Bilimoria to send a duly accredited representative of Ratan Tata's estate to Patna personally '...to make a careful and exhaustive examination of the materials... and come to a decision on the basis on the basis of the things themselves...'¹¹¹ The executors of Tata's Will nominated Mr S. Fyzee Rahamin as their representative to inspect the Pataliputra antiquities in person.

Rahamin arrived at Patna on 4 July 1920 and was shown around the site by V. Natesa Aiyar, the then officiating Superintendent of the Central Circle of the ASI, and Babu Hari Das Dutta, Spooner's native assistant in Pataliputra excavations. Rahamin appeared impressed by the sites. However, it was Rahamin's close scrutiny of the movable antiquities, which brewed the trouble. Aiyar reported

¹⁰⁷ Letter of A.J. Bilimoria to the Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Education, of 18 February 1919, no. 10 (III) of 1919, DGASIR.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Letter of Bilimoria to the Officiating Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Education, of 14th April 1919, no. 10 (III) of 1919, DGASIR.

¹¹⁰ Letter of Bilimoria to Spooner of 20 February 1919, no. 10 (III) of 1919, DGASIR.

¹¹¹ Letter of Spooner to Bilimoria of 17 March 1919, no. 10 (III) of 1919, DGASIR.

that after his initial inspection of 5 July 1920, 'Mr. Rahamin came again the next day and after another close scrutiny of the objects asked me more than once if these were all that were discovered by Dr. Spooner.'¹¹² Aiyar and Babu Hari Das Dutta assured Rahamin that to the best of their knowledge '...there were no more and that there was no reason whatsoever to suspect the contrary.'¹¹³ We have already seen that Spooner's excavations at Patna failed to yield any of the grand artistic antiquities that Tata was pushing for. The stark absence of such antiquities, such as sculptures, in the Pataliputra collection, probably led Rahamin to doubt foul play. Spooner, who was away in Simla, sent a confidential note to Aiyar asking for a detailed list of Pataliputra antiquities to crosscheck them and put to rest the '...rather serious charges or insinuations...' afflicted on the Department by the executors of Tata's estate.¹¹⁴ When crosschecked, it appeared that only a few minor antiquities like seals or buttons were missing and nothing of the grand sculptures as Rahamin had suspected. During Rahamin's visit, Aiyar had also tried to persuade the Executors of Tata's Will to give in to the demands of retaining the Pataliputra antiquities in the Patna Museum, citing the cause of scientific archaeological research.¹¹⁵ However, it seems that the final decision of the Executors of Tata's estate to discard the proposed transfer of finds to Bombay and to settle on retaining the antiquities in the Patna Museum rested less on the concerns of scientific archaeological research or consideration of local sentiments in Bihar and Orissa. The sheer absence of grand sculptural remains, of the kind Tata and his heirs were pushing for in the Pataliputra finds ultimately saved them from being carted away to Bombay.¹¹⁶ The Pataliputra antiquities thus came into the custody of the provincial museum of Patna as the Sir Ratan Tata Collection.¹¹⁷

¹¹² Letter of V. Natesa Aiyar to the Director General of Archaeology in India of 14 September 1920, no. 10 (III) of 1919, DGASIR.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Letter of D. B. Spooner to V. Natesa Aiyar of 25 September 1920, no. 10 (III) of 1919, DGASIR.

¹¹⁵ Letter of Aiyar to the Director General of Archaeology in India of 14 September 1920, no. 10 (III) of 1919, DGASIR.

¹¹⁶ See, Letter of A.J. Bilimoria to John Marshall of 15 December 1920, no. 10 (III) of 1919, DGASIR.

¹¹⁷ Subsequent Annual Reports of the Patna Museum Committee and Markham and Hargreaves's survey report on museums of India speak of a collection of 'Antiquities excavated in Patna by the Archaeological Survey of India from funds provided by the late Sir Ratan Tata' in the Museum. See, S.F. Markham and Hargreaves, *The Museums of India*, p. 193. The remaining balance from Tata's advance for 1918 was donated by his heirs to continue excavations at the Bulandi Bagh site under the supervision of Manoranjan Ghosh, the curator of the newly established Patna Museum. See Letter of Bilimoria to D.B. Spooner of 8 March 1922, no. 10 (III) of 1919, DGASIR. Ghosh carried on excavations at Bulandi Bagh with Tata's balance in 1922 and from 1925–27 he along with J.A. Page carried on excavations at Sandalpur and other areas near Bulandi Bagh and Kumrahar. These excavations yielded large number of terracotta figurines, which are now housed in the Terracotta Gallery of the Patna Museum.

And, interestingly, the Parsi patron or his heirs never gave up on Spooner's Parsi thesis. Even after Tata's death and after finally relinquishing their claims over the Pataliputra antiquities, the executors of Tata's Will still hung on to Spooner's work as the final return of their investment. Writing to Marshall about the ultimate consent of the executors of Tata's Will to retain the antiquities in Patna, A.J. Bilimoria pushed the point that the '...theory of Iranian influence on ancient Indian history which Dr. Spooner has been seeking to establish is a matter of much greater importance and the Executors are of the opinion that everything possible should be done to give Dr. Spooner proper facilities for completing the book.... It appears advisable therefore that after the time and money already spent, he should be afforded the opportunity of bringing together the conclusions in a book.... The Executors would therefore be glad if through your help Dr. Spooner could be set free from his present duties for a few months to set himself exclusively on this work and see it through.'¹¹⁸ But over the years, Marshall and the entire Department tried to distance themselves from Spooner's controversial project. In his reply to Bilimoria, Marshall acknowledged with extreme gratitude the donation of the Pataliputra antiquities to the Patna Museum. However, he clarified that Spooner's researches '...in regard to Iranian influences in India have been more a private than an official concern of his.... I consider therefore that it should be left to him to complete his book at his own convenience.'¹¹⁹ The proposed book never saw the light of the day. In 1925, still at work on substantially revising the draft of his thesis, Spooner passed away in his 40s like his Parsi patron. In the absence of the book, we may never know what Spooner's revised draft contained.¹²⁰ However, what we know for sure is that the debate did not end with Spooner, nor was it restricted to the Mauryan complex of Kumrahar. Even in Spooner's lifetime, it was carried across to other sites and antiquities in Patna, to antiquities emanating not directly out of the Pataliputra excavations of Ratan Tata. The emerging Indian scholars not only indigenised things Mauryan but also pushed for a higher antiquity

¹¹⁸ Letter of A.J. Bilimoria to John H. Marshall of 15 December 1920, no. 10 (III) of 1919, DGASIR.

¹¹⁹ Letter of Marshall to Bilimoria of 10 January 1921, no. 10 (III) of 1919, DGASIR.

¹²⁰ The question of Persepolitan influence on Mauryan art and architecture, however, outlived Spooner's thesis. Later day art historians and archaeologists have argued with varying degree of emphasis about the Achaemenid influence on Maurya sculpture and architecture, especially on the Mauryan pillars and pillar capitals. However, this debate was never articulated in such politically pointed rhetoric as it had happened in Spooner's lifetime in the context of the Pataliputra excavations. Mary Stewart in her recent article argues that while subsequent archaeologists and historians like Mortimer Wheeler and Percy Brown agreed about Persian influence in the Mauryan remains of Kumrahar; they never acknowledged Spooner's contribution to the whole project. Stewart portrays Spooner as a victim of Indian nationalism and Western, particularly British antiquarian scholarship. See Stewart, 'Iranian Cultural Impact: The Persepolitan Legacy in India', 2006.

of an autonomous Indian civilisation. And sufficiently indigenised, Pataliputra and its movable antiquities in the 'safe custody' of the new Provincial Museum emerged as the sites of production of a body of regional historical literature from Patna, which finally attested the ancient metropolis as the domain of lived provincial heritage.

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