Annals of the Archive: Ethnographic Notes on the Sources of History

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History is the work expended on material documentation (books, texts, accounts, registers, acts, buildings, institutions, laws, techniques, objects, customs, etc.) that exists, in every time and place, in every society . . . in our time, history is that which transforms documents into monuments . . . in our time, history aspires to the condition of archaeology, to the intrinsic description of the monument.—Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*

It is the state which first presents subject matter that is not only adapted to the prose of History, but involves the production of such history in the progress of its own being.—G. F. W. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*

Ethnography of the Archive

The first time I entered an archive, I panicked. My historical zeal inexplicably vanished as I desperately stemmed a welling desire to exit immediately and search for the nearest pub. I saw before me the thousands of documents I could indent, the books I could read, the files I had to wade through. I tried to imagine which index to consult, what department to decipher, how best to control the chaos of what seemed an infinite chain of documents. My proposal for research, so lucid a minute before, seemed inappropriate, unwise, impossible. I felt embarrassed to expose my ignorance in front of professional archivists anxious to discern a research topic that might bear some relationship to the archive itself. Alas, my interest in the small voices and contradictory ruptures of history was not designed for easy access. My proposal to understand the essential relationship between political authority and social relations could take me to any fragment, and yet I knew that all fragments were not equal, that

most documents by themselves were mere reminders of the quotidian tedium of history, that I not only needed to start somewhere, I needed to start somewhere promising. The archive is a glorious monument of history, but the documents within are simply the sedimented detritus of a history that from the inside had seemed both endless and banal.

Most historians write history before they enter the archive, beginning their professional apprenticeship by using those secondary sources in libraries that are already contaminated by interpretation and selection. But even at the beginning, such sources establish their authenticity through referencing an archive that demarcates the partial and secondary nature of all sources from outside. The archive is constituted as the only space that is free of context, argument, ideology—indeed history itself. Accordingly, historians can only really become historians or write history once they have been to the archive. The originary arrival of the historian in the archive is much like the arrival of the anthropologist in the field—that threshold of disciplinary certification—the magical moment when the scientist-scholar sets down upon a shore that beckons with the promise that one can finally engage in the act of discovery, at last come face to face with truth and the realm of unmediated facts. But while anthropologists have subjected their arrival stories to historical and critical scrutiny, the historian's arrival story is largely untold, shielded by the fact that while the archive has often seemed mystical, it has never appeared exotic. Travelers' tales and adventurers' yarns have never rendered the archive a major source of narrative, and yet the monumentality of the archive is enshrined in a set of assumptions about truth that are fundamental both to the discipline of history and to the national foundations of history. While these assumptions about truth and history have been critiqued in relation to historical writing (and the use of sources), they have rarely been examined in relation to the sources themselves, except inside the very historical footnotes that summon the greatest respect for the archive as a repository of ultimate value (Grafton 1997).[1] The archive is simultaneously the outcome of historical process and the very condition for the production of historical knowledge. The time has come to historicize the archive.[2]

My own archive arrival story was prefaced by several years of working with original documents that themselves preceded the establishment of the modern archive. Intrigued as I was by the character of the premodern state in southern India, I began my professional career as a historian by reading epigraphical series and reports, transcriptions and translations of inscriptions that were for the most part etched into either stone or copper surfaces. Stone inscriptions typically recorded endowments to temples and were inscribed on the stone walls of the shrines where worship was to be conducted, or on the walls

surrounding the centers of worship. Copper-plate inscriptions were typically held by the descendants of kings, landlords, and various other magnates whose entitlements to land, tribute, office, and honor were itemized, publicly declared, and permanently instantiated by the presentation of the material text. In addition to recording details of landholding rights and relations, political positions and perquisites, ritual emoluments and entailments, and so on, these inscribed surfaces provided occasions for textual performances of various kinds, most significantly when the pedigree of the presenter became the basis for historical narrations of the exploits and exemplariness of certain families and their forebears. Inscriptions thus provided the stuff of history—the details of property and politics, identity and institutions—at the same time that they were themselves historical texts, recording in genealogical form the claims made by history itself for and about authority. History was already monumental, most particularly in the elaborate and sometimes enormous temple complexes that yielded surface after surface for textual inscription, but also in the use of precious metals to insure the permanence of the text (though its very preciousness meant there was always the temptation for textual meltdown). In one sense history was only monumental, for the myriad other texts that must have been etched on the surfaces of palmyra palm were consigned to certain obsolescence in ways that meant that if history was to last, it had to be written on or as a monument.

But if the temple complex was itself an archive, it was an archive of a very different kind than we imagine when we contemplate the contemporary institution. The walls of the temple complex served in one sense as a local record room, the origins of most modern archives; however, the records were attached to a preexisting monument, and functioned in effect to secure the monument as well as the authoritative relations and figures whose own power was symbolized and deployed through the institutional formation of the temple. And despite the ample epigraphical record, the actual record is slight compared to any modern paper archive, and with all the textual efflorescence of preambles and genealogical histories, the details of administrative procedure were few, far between, and only rarely cross-referenced in ways that betrayed the constant surveillance and custodianship of a bureaucratic managerial elite that would seem the sine qua non of modern archives and states.

Nevertheless, the temple complex was an archive of sorts. It preserved records necessary for the maintenance of a polity, even as the polity itself relied heavily on the institutional relations of the temple. And it preserved these records for reference use as well as in ways that worked to monumentalize both history and its documents. The inscriptional texts themselves appear emblem-

atic of a particular kind of archival history, combining the most banal of details with the most glorious panegyrics in praise of kingly dynasties, local rulers, and institutional arrangements (ranging from the banking functions of temples or the maintenance of ritual performances to the memorialization of property relations and honorific offices). At the same time, neither historians nor "history" proper was necessary for the transformation of documents into history, as happened later when the myriad record offices of government still had to be monumentalized into archives in order to transit from the realm of governmentality to the domain of history. In southern India, documents began their careers as monuments.

It was with this experience of history that I set off on my journey to the archive. Even though by then I had shifted my own historical interests from the eighth and ninth centuries to the eighteenth and nineteenth, I was still ambivalent about the modern archive. Given my interest in precolonial state and society—specifically in charting out the nature of kingly authority and caste relations in southern India immediately before the onset of British colonial rule and then tracing transformations over the first colonial century—I was keen to find documents that existed before the modern colonial state and its documentation apparatus. At best, the archive might have admitted documents from an earlier age as an expression of the colonial state's need to know how things really were before the British arrived. But I worried that the archive was at least in part about the contamination of the west, or the modern, or both. At the same time, I walked into the archive with all the trepidation of the academic apprentice, worried that I would never penetrate the secrets of the archive, and worse that the secrets of the archive were impenetrable not because of the daring originality of my line of research but because of my fundamental ignorance of the archival structure of the conditions of historical knowledge.

The archive that inaugurated my experience as a historian was the India Office Library in London. Originally the library and record room of the India Office, the agency of the British government that oversaw Britain's colonial relationship with India until independence in 1947, it had been moved into a separate archive in the early 1970s, subsequently placed under the management of the British Library, and has now been moved to and amalgamated with the archival and library holdings of the new British Library in St. Pancras. Despite the shabby postwar high-rise that housed the miles of shelves, I walked into the archive for the first time with all the excitement that my fellow anthropology students had reserved for the moment they arrived in a "field of their own." My excitement soon merged with terror when I realized that I hadn't a clue about what to do next—whether I should look at the index for the political, public, or

home departments, what the mechanisms might be for genealogical research, and how to access either Tamil or English manuscript collections. I remember spending the first day paging through the index of one particular department with a key word that failed to appear for anything more than the most trivial of documents. In frustration, I handcopied one very long letter that seemed vaguely important (only to realize later that I had already photocopied a passage from a government manual where all the good bits had already been excerpted). I wondered why the archive seemed far less satisfying than a basic university library. I panicked, feeling a bizarre envy for the traditional research historian who was assigned a topic on the basis of a specific collection of records or documents their supervisor had preselected for them, at the same time wondering if I should just discard history and go to the field instead, trying my hand at anthropology, the flip side of my disciplinary formation and training.[3] At the same time, I realized I would have to do extensive fieldwork on the archive itself,[4] learning both about the history of British governmental rule at the concrete levels of yearly bureaucratic organization and interaction, and about the history of various kinds of collections and record keeping.

Little by little, step by step, I learned about the nature, classifications, and institutional investments of some of the records and collections that were to become the primary documentation for my thesis. I also began to learn about the complex relationship between archives in Britain and archives in India—what sorts of files, what levels of detail, and what manner of departments were to be found and could be found to organize materials at the India Office Library in London, the National Archives of India in New Delhi, and the Tamil Nadu Record Office in Madras. The London and Delhi offices paid particular interest to the Princely States of India, one of which came to be the primary historical and ethnographic site for my research on state and society. At the same time, to find out much in the way of detail about the actual land settlements that implemented the introduction of new forms of property and new relations between "cultivators" and the state, I learned that I had to look at the "settlement registers" that were housed in Madras itself. So daunted was I by the stacks of settlements when I first encountered them that I found it difficult to anticipate that I would later come to relish these records; as it happened, I spent much of my thesis research period looking at records of tax-free land settlements, gradually coming to realize the extent to which these "inam" land classifications revealed much about the way the history of political privileges from precolonial times was sedimented into landed privileges under the early colonial regime.

My first experience of the archive was thus frustrating for several major reasons, quite apart from the myriad frustrations that any scholar working in

archives in the 1970s took for granted, such as the absence of photocopy machines, the now unimaginable absence of the computer, and the often highly personalized contingencies of archival access. I was frustrated not only because I felt buried under the weight of archival excess, but because this excess seemed to signify (indeed amplify) the distortions of a colonial regime, one that either sought to eradicate the past, or to represent it in ways that seemed at best mobilized as evidence for unreliable arguments in favor of one or another colonial rhetorics of rule. I was, after all, determined to discover what I could about the nature of state and society in the immediate precolonial period, and the more I looked in colonial archives, the more I felt the impossibility of the project. And so I began to spend increasing numbers of hours away from the archive in a library of "Oriental Manuscripts" that housed, among other things, the manuscript collection of Colin Mackenzie.

Colin Mackenzie, an engineer and mathematician by training, went to India as an army man and soon became known for his extraordinary cartographic talents, first designing plans of military assault then plans for surveying and mapping newly conquered territories. His surveying skills were recognized as he was designated as the Surveyor-General of Madras in 1810, only to become the first Surveyor-General of India in 1815. Mackenzie, a Scot from the outer Hebrides who, like many other educated Scots of his time, went to India to find a more flourishing career than would have been available in Scotland, was also an avid antiquarian and became vitally committed to the collection of historical materials about peninsular India. On his own initiative and with his own resources he hired and trained a group of local assistants who helped him collect local histories of kingly dynasties, chiefly families, castes, villages, temples, and monasteries, as well as of other local traditions and religious and philosophical texts in a variety of Indian languages. He also took rubbings of stone and copper-plate inscriptions, collected coins, images, and antiquities, and made extensive plans and drawings wherever he went. By the time of his death in 1821, he had amassed a collection of 3,000 inscriptions, 1,568 literary manuscripts, 2,070 local tracts, and large portfolios and collections of drawings, plans, images, and antiquities (Dirks 1993).

The Mackenzie archive promised unmediated access to the historical mentalities and genres of the late precolonial period. As I attempted to understand the nature of the holdings of the archive through a range of indexes and annotations that were compiled as early as 1828 in the still canonical account of the collection by H. H. Wilson (1828), I came to be especially interested in historical texts that were generally called "vamcavali," or dynastic histories of kingly/chiefly families. These texts are genealogies of a sort, both in that they

list the entire line of the family, and in that genealogy acts as the narrative frame of the text. What chronology is to modern historical narrative, genealogy is to the vamcavali—it provides both sequence and structure. Typically, each episode consists of some action performed by a hero-ancestor, which is then followed by an account of gifts made by a great king to that of a chiefly ancestor. For example, the hero may kill a tiger that has been plaguing villagers in the king's domain or set off to do battle against some enemy of the king's. The king then calls the chief to court where he presents him with gifts consisting of titles, emblems, and rights over land. The basic structure of the texts often seems repetitive, albeit conveying little in the way of "social historical" information. Rather, historical events that lead to the establishment or reestablishment of a special relationship between the chief and a king are elevated to narrative significance and serve to herald the accomplishments of each noteworthy ancestor. Further, the royal family is seen to have the accumulated merit of these discrete historical events, inheriting the full measure of royal perquisites and entitlements that reflect the heroic history of the family (Dirks 1993b).

However, even as I took these texts as the record not just of particular histories but also of particular kinds of history, I became aware that they were not positioned fully outside colonial history. Many of the chiefly family histories concluded with petitions for recognition, reinstatement, or some other claim for authority and position. Some of the most glorious family histories were of kingly families that had participated in the late eighteenth-century wars against the British (sometimes in collaboration with the French), leaving the contemporary kings in disgrace. Other family histories turned out to be claims on behalf of the branch of the family that had been bested by another in internecine struggles for landlord status/privileges under the new terms of British rule. Even as old regime logics of heroism, gift exchange, and royal relationship were clearly in evidence in the old histories, these texts also demonstrated their inexorable historical embeddedness in new logics of colonial power and command.

In subsequent research, I further learned that the Mackenzie collection itself was part of the history of early colonial conquest. Mackenzie collected texts while mapping and surveying newly conquered territories of southern India. Even though he never conducted a revenue survey, scrupulously avoiding direct inquiries about production and revenue, there was no way to promise that knowledge about local lineages or tenures might not be used by an imperial power that was at this very point establishing itself as a revenue state. Indeed, virtually all of the information collected by Mackenzie turned out to concern the rights and privileges of kings, chiefs, headmen, Brahmans, and religious

institutions. There was good reason for what one of Mackenzie's assistants characterized as "friendless suspicion." Additionally, the collection of materials was actually conducted by a variety of local assistants, many though not all learned Brahmans, who had multiple agendas, interests, and locations of their own. Mackenzie's assistants were invested in certain kinds of representations of India, at the same time that they sought assiduously to please their "master" and satisfy his endless ambition to collect local histories and texts.

Even when traces of precolonial voices, genres, and forms survive in the Mackenzie archive, they do so in the context of colonial interest. Certainly the different voices, agencies, and modes of authorization that were implicated in the production of the archive were substantially lost once they inhabited the colonial archive. Distinctions between types of texts (e.g. texts that derived from ancient authorship or the hastily transcribed remarks from a local source) and concerns about the use-value of knowledge (how textual knowledge might be used to de-authorize and de-legitimate) became blurred and increasingly dissolved at each stage of collection, transcription, translation, and canonization. And the role of Mackenzie's native assistants became relegated to the position of technical mediation, their diaries and letters rarely included with the textual material. The early colonial archive was itself a form of colonization, reproduced even in the conceits of antiquity and authenticity that characterize the Mackenzie collection.

Nevertheless, colonial interests in knowledge changed over time and did so dramatically in the period between the late eighteenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries. If the Mackenzie collection reflects early colonial interests, it is also the case that within a decade of Mackenzie's death in 1821 the collection changed from seeming a significant resource to becoming a historical burden. The distinguished Orientalist H. H. Wilson almost abandoned his cataloguing project when he realized the growing lack of interest in Mackenzie's work; the materials in the collection seemed neither historical enough to satisfy any genuine historical interest in the reconstruction of precolonial Indian history, nor classical enough to provide a respectable basis for an Orientalist's reputation or labor. At the same time that we acknowledge the early colonial mediations that produced the very textual forms and forms of knowledge enshrined in the Mackenzie collection, we must also realize that Mackenzie's texts occupy a marginal position, both in the archive and in the colonial state project that archived the documents. The histories that Mackenzie had collected had already been overtaken by a different kind of history.

What survives instead at the center of the early colonial archive are the land records that became so fundamental to the debates over land tenure and

settlement in the initial years of British rule. These documents—used so extensively by historians of agrarian relations—turn out to be far more than assessments of different land parcels and their potential (or actual) productivity, as at first they seemed. Rather, they acted as interventions in the way the colonial state worked to constitute land relations as the basis of the state's ultimate right of ownership and more generally land records intervened in the colonial state's delineation of relationships between state and society. The early colonial state after it shed its initial formation in the mercantilist origins of the East India Company was above all an agrarian state that used various representations of Oriental despotism to justify its legitimacy and bolster its claims to ultimate power through the bureaucratic regulation of and extraction of revenue from landed property. Building on arguments between those who argued that the East India Company was inheriting the king's right of ownership over all property and those who used a Ricardian theory of rent to claim for the Company the right to set revenue rates and collect taxes as fundamental to the custodial project of the state, the British (all the while ceding sovereignty at a formal level to the Mughal rulers) gradually established a state bureaucracy, focusing primarily on land revenue, that acted as if it had sovereign authority over all of India. Decisions about whether the bureaucracy should accord proprietary rights to landlords (*zamindars*), village brotherhoods, or principal cultivators (*ryots*) became critical interventions in the relationship between state and society, at the same time that these decisions both produced, and were produced by, a variety of different histories of India that were important parts of early colonial rhetorics of rule.

When I first waded through settlement land records, I did so to determine the nature of agrarian relations in different parts of southern India and also to assess arguments made by different administrators about the nature of the precolonial village community. The arguments were complex and robustly documented and always assumed that historical forms were necessary predicates for colonial policies. Intellectual histories of some of the key players of the period have revealed how much historical argument was tied to political ambition and European experience. Cornwallis was influenced by the physiocrats and driven by his ambition to recreate in India the authority and position of the landed gentry in Britain (already under major assault and in considerable defensiveness given the events of the revolution in France); Munro and Elphinstone were captured by Burkean rhetorics of paternal responsibility and a Scottish sense of the folk heroism of the yeoman cultivator. But despite my sense of the intellectual genealogies of land policy, I only realized little by little how much the documentation project of the early colonial state around matters of land and

revenue was fundamental to the formation of that very state. Indeed, during the period heralded by Warren Hasting's disgrace (at the hands of Edmund Burke) in the late eighteenth century and brought to a chastened conclusion around the events of the Great Rebellion of 1857, the colonial state formed around the relationship of revenue to land itself. The commercial enterprises of the East India Company yielded steadily in importance to the arguments of free traders who saw in landed wealth the development of a new market for British goods, at the same time that economic activity was progressively yoked to the grand imperial project of political and military expansion.

The Archive of Ethnography

By the second half of the nineteenth century the colonial state had to transform itself once again. If land and the revenue and authority that accrued from its relationship with the state were so fundamental to the formation of the early colonial state, the fact that the rebellions of 1857 quickly led to agrarian revolt and the steadily diversifying economic character of imperial power (propelled by the building of railways in the 1850s) made it clear that things had to change. Land tax was still an important source of revenue in the late nineteenth century, but imperial ambition moved to an altogether new level. The steady absorption of new lands through the aggressive policies of Lord Dalhousie, that in the taking of Oudh in 1856 had led directly to the Great Rebellion of 1857, were brought abruptly to a halt, and policies of indirect rule were mobilized to accommodate and ultimately appropriate the incomplete project of colonial conquest (one third of India remained under princely control at the time of the rebellion). Concurrently, the rebellion made it clear that some communities in India could be counted as loyal, as others became doomed to perpetual suspicion. Bengalis were no longer to be recruited to the armed forces, which were now to be stocked only by the loyal "martial" races, as Macaulay's hyperbole was translated into state policy. In the new rhetorical economy of colonial rule, political loyalty replaced landed status. And the form of knowledge and argument that seemed most appropriate to assess matters of loyalty rather than histories of land control was knowledge of peoples and cultures. To put the matter in bold relief, after 1857 anthropology supplanted history as the principal colonial modality of knowledge. The colonial state changed from a "revenue state" to an "ethnographic state" (Dirks 2001).

I am not referring here to disciplines of knowledge in the modern sense; anthropology had not yet been invented as an academic discipline in any case (though its invention was certainly tied to its rising significance for colonial

rule), and Indian history for Europe was not only written outside the academy but usually in the corridors of colonial bureaucracy—or as the work of colonial bureaucrats, as in the case of Mill and Elphinstone. Rather, I am suggesting that the foundational importance of historical argument for land policy yielded to another overriding concern, namely to identify those populations that were inherently loyal to the British and to learn the customs of other populations in order to know and control them in a grand effort to avoid the humiliating and near fatal calamity of the rebellion. In part the product of strategic repression, in part the product of the ebullient illusion of permanence characteristic of late-nineteenth-century "high" imperial rule, this was an age in which the history of conquest was virtually erased; the Cambridge historian Seeley noted in his imperial history lectures that India had been conquered in a "fit of absent-mindedness." In place of this history, an anthropology of the peoples and cultures of India became the canonical knowledge of empire. The decennial census, begun in 1871, became the apotheosis of the new ethnographic imperative of the colonial state.

At the heart of this new knowledge, caste was viewed as the primary institution—and sphere of social relations—that articulated the legacies of tradition, standing in place of the historical-mindedness that was seen as absent from Indian sensibilities. Colonial historiography increasingly conceded to anthropology the study of historical subjects which had not yet entered modernity. Anthropology grew out of modern history, becoming the history of those without history as well as the prehistory of those now mired in history. By the late nineteenth century, anthropology became quite literally the history of the colonized. In this division of disciplinary labor, anthropology, whether of a physical body or a body politic, was less a complement than an extension of modern history, spatialized by the logic of colonial conquest and rule, linked directly to the interests and forms of the state. And in the global imperial order of things, history was to the modern metropolitan state what anthropology was to the colonial state, reflecting both the similarities and the differences between state systems at home and in the colonies. History constructed a glorious past for the nation in which the present was the inevitable teleological frame; anthropology assumed histories that necessitated colonial rule. History told the story of the nation; anthropology explained why a nation had not yet emerged—as for example in Risley's understanding of caste as an impediment to national mobilization (Risley 1909).

If the British failed to see history as a fundamental attribute of Indian culture, it is no coincidence that they established their rule on the ruins of a political (and historical) order that they had aggressively conquered, destroyed,

and replaced. Mackenzie had been one of the last colonial savants to exercise himself primarily in the collection of local, indigenous histories. James Mill propounded instead that whatever past India might have could be left in the dustbin of history, arguing with liberal intention that all that was good in India would be imported from Britain (Mehta 1999). Colonial history was generally overtaken by the concern to document not simply land tenures but the relationships between land and the state. But by the middle of the century history was at best irrelevant, at worst an embarrassment, and colonial anthropology took on growing importance. Thus the late nineteenth century witnessed the first experiments in ethnographic surveys, even as the records in the archives increasingly reflected a colonial preoccupation with the customs and social relations of the people of India. I can only assert this argument here, but I have written elsewhere about the way in which late-nineteenth-century arguments about social policy tended increasingly to reflect anthropological sensibilities—as for example in British concerns, mobilized in part by missionary pressure to regulate forms of religious expression that appeared to be particularly backward or barbarous (Dirks 1997). At the same time, there was an explosion of writing—in books, treatises, and administrative files—about caste. Caste was used to explain and to classify, to predict and contain the potential unruliness and recalcitrance of colonial subjects; indeed caste became an alternative colonial civil society that made other kinds of civic institutions, let alone political rights, seem either unnecessary, or foreign, or both. As a result, the state and the archive became increasingly ethnographic.

Reflections on the Archive

I have suggested elsewhere the need for anthropologists engaged in the study of their own history to approach the colonial archive both as the repository of sources for their research and in terms of larger historical contexts that document the genealogical entailments of colonial knowledge for contemporary scholarship (Dirks 1999). And yet I would also advocate the need for historians to engage in an ethnography of the archive, for the archive itself reflects the forms and formations of historical knowledge that have been so markedly shaped by their implication in the history of the state whose past it is meant to enshrine. To engage in an ethnography of the archive entails going well beyond seeing it as an assemblage of texts, a depository of and for history. The archive is a discursive formation in the totalizing sense that it reflects the categories and operations of the state itself—in the case presented here, of the colonial state.

The state literally produces, adjudicates, organizes, and maintains the discourses that become available as the primary texts of history.

When I did historical research on the late nineteenth century, I consulted the records of the "Public" Department, the "Political" Department, and the "Home" Department, among many others. I paged through indexes of documents that reflected the quotidian procedures of government, files that considered and then ruled on issues ranging from the appointment of a particular individual to a position (such as Superintendent of Ethnography) to his salary and his official duties, both of which were scaled in relation to the other positions, financial needs, and political requirements of government. When I found materials about so-called barbaric practices such as hookswinging, I read through files that responded to widespread pressure from missionaries and others regarding the suppression of an activity that brought no grievous bodily harm and little in the way of significant social unrest to the attention of district administrators, who nevertheless had to worry about the representation of governmental activities both within India and back in Britain itself. When I began to correlate the interest of official ethnography in native bodily practices with the Torture Commission Report of 1855, I had to rely on my own archival experience of working with land and settlement records as early as the late eighteenth century in order to dismantle the character of official self-congratulation in relation to the deployment of horror stories around brutality and violence in the south Indian countryside. Each record in the archive references previous records, both as precedent and as paper trail; archival research itself invariably proceeds genealogically—record by record, decision by decision, trace by trace. Although documents are frequently scripted with posterity in mind, history in one sense is an afterthought, only incidentally related to the sources that are fetishized as so fundamental to the craft of history itself. And yet history is encoded on the surfaces of the very files—the numbering systems, the departmental structures, and classificatory rubrics—as well as in the reports, letters, decisions, and scribbles within that make up the archive. The archive contains primary sources at the same time that it is always already a secondary trace of historical discourse.

The archive encodes a great many levels, genres, and expressions of governmentality. Commissions of Inquiry have very different histories from routine papers that surface in the government orders of everyday official practice; government manuals and gazetteers have very different uses from occasional notes or office correspondence that move in haphazard circuits of official (and semi-official) exchange. Historical research can reveal connections that become

effaced by the effects of history itself: for example, the connection between the proliferation of land records and debates over the proper way to introduce a proprietary economy into India and the need of the colonial state for a form of revenue and political authority that would circumvent the rising power of commercial elites; between the anxiety over agrarian and military revolt and the social classifications that became hardened into late-colonial views of caste; between the concerns of the police to apprehend habitual criminals and the general criminalization of colonial populations in the early development of anthropometry; and between the modern career of anthropology (as well as general social scientific thought about such issues as tradition and modernity) and the legacies of the colonial past. Even as the connections never completely come full circle—never foreclosing the possibilities of other connections and frequently displacing other possible ones—they move us well away from the certainties of linear and autonomous textual histories of anthropology and history, dissolving texts into contexts even as contexts constantly become reabsorbed by other texts and historical traces. While the archive has no transparency of its own—its facts can be construed in any number of ways, and the historical record alone can by no means explain why we write the way we do—it is nevertheless the field within which we all conduct our research, pushing us by its recalcitrance, limiting us by its aggravating absences, fascinating us by its own patterns of intertextuality, and seducing us by its appearance of the real.

The colonial archive has a peculiar opacity. While all archives reflect their particular origins as state records, colonial archives betray the additional contradictions of colonial governmentality. In the case of India, the early colonial state was officially answerable to the British Parliament and Crown through a cumbersome process that required a minimum of six months for the exchange of correspondence by sea. In fact, the East India Company, a monopoly joint stock firm, ran the day to day affairs of the colony, only yielding provisional authority after a century of incomparable corruption, giving way completely after a military mutiny and agrarian revolt virtually brought the empire to its knees in 1857–58. But even after the assumption of Crown rule, the subjects of empire were governed by imperial fiat with none of the demands of public representation and accountability encountered by the metropolitan state. Revenue records might have debated the high points of Mughal history in order to find precedents for Ricardian theories of rent, but the question of legitimation was balanced only by threats of disorder rather than by the checks of dissent and debate. Perhaps even more critically, the accumulation of an ethnographic archive in the late nineteenth century worked not just to displace colonial sovereignty but to proclaim the colonial subject as lacking both in political ca-

pabilities and in historical understanding. As a result, the archive reflects the shift of state anxiety from the political and juridical to the social and cultural. Caste identity, for example, became not just the object of knowledge but the end of knowledge, eclipsing political persuasion, class position, or regional interests as the basis for state concerns about control and containment. The ethnographic state produced ethnographic subjects, not political ones. The colonial archive resisted the onset of modern history.

Modern history could only develop in the metropole, on the interior ruins of eschatological conventions that were anchored in theological temporalities and religious institutions. But with the eighteenth-century recognition that history had an open future came the steady appropriation of this enlightenment sensibility by the apparatus of the state. The state became the measure for nascent temporalities as surely as it provided the boundaries for nationally conceived social spaces (Koselleck 1985). The state also became the instrumentality through which historical documents became meaningful as the primary and authentic record of the past. History served as a principal form of governmentality at the same time that governmentality expressed itself through the categories of historical thought and writing. In more prosaic terms, history was organized theoretically in narratives that made the state (and, when not arrested by colonial rule, ultimately the nation) into the subject and the object of temporal consequence; it also became primarily located within the formal ambits and agencies of state power. History was written by the state to educate and justify political policies and practices, and it was produced and preserved by the state for future historical reference in the archive. The archive, that primary site of state monumentality, was the very institution that canonized, crystallized, and classified the knowledge required by the state even as it made this knowledge available for subsequent generations in the cultural form of a neutral repository of the past.[5]

Many commentators, from Hegel to Koselleck, have noted that modern history—or rather the modern idea of history—was born with the French Revolution. It is perhaps even more true to say that the modern archive was born with the French Revolution, and, as befits that tumultuous event, the modern archive was as much about the destruction as it was about the preservation of the past (Posner 1984). The Archives Nationales of Paris was created by the Decree of September 12, 1790, and open access to the archives was declared a right of citizenship rather than a perquisite of state power (or scholarly interest) (Panitch 1996). Older archives had been in the possession of kings and courts and were placed only at the disposition of those in power, largely for the preservation of titles to rights, privileges, honors, and land. The modern archive was

born in the violence of revolution precisely because of the way documents had supported the privilege of the old regime; according to Philippe Sagnac, in many acts of rural rebellion, the French peasant, "took his own Bastille, invaded the chateaux, ran straight to the seigneurial archives, held at last in his hands the charters, monuments of his own servitude, and delivered them to the fire" (Sagnac 1973, 85). More centrally, the new government itself initiated the wholesale destruction of records as part of its revolutionary program. State-sponsored bonfires consigned papers of the nobility, orders of knighthood, and other documents of the old regime to ashes in the years between 1789 and 1793, a policy extolled by none other than Condorcet: "It is today that, in the capital, Reason burns, at the foot of the statue of Louis XIV, 600 folio volumes attesting to the vanity of this class whose titles will at last disappear in smoke" (Panitch 1996, 34).

The new French State did not maintain the full openness of the archive, as the imperatives of the postrevolutionary nation-state had to accommodate new forms of privilege and secrecy (Milligan). In England, where no revolution produced such a dramatic archival history, the modern archive developed directly out of the records of the Chancery Department, most of which were housed in the Tower of London until the Public Record Office was built in the middle of the nineteenth century.[6] Unlike in France, where the new archives were established as part of a new revolutionary state with the specific purpose of undermining the old regime, in England the archives embodied the rights and privileges that had been appropriated by the British aristocracy over centuries (Schellenberg 1964). The establishment of the Public Record Office roughly coincided with the electoral reforms that sought to enlarge the voting public and open the procedures of government to the new, increasingly urban and mercantile bourgeoisie. But colonial records remained in the India Office, tied as they were directly to protocols of governance, until the end of empire itself. Unsurprisingly, the idea of public access for colonial records required the emergence of a postcolonial public (although the principal public for the India Office Record Room is still the British ex-colonial). The contradictions of colonial governmentality extended both to history and to the archives, exemplifying the limits of representation and accountability that were so fundamental to the colonial relationship.

In reflecting briefly on the history of archives, and in retelling the history of the archives of my own research career, I have attempted to call attention to some of the ways in which the archive not only contains documents but is itself the primary document of history. At the same time, I have commented on the particular character of the colonial archive. From the beginning of colonial

conquest, long before historical narratives had given way to ethnographic accounts, colonial governmentality produced a different kind of relationship to the past, and to its collection, preservation, and destruction, than had been the case in the imperial metropole. In many ways, the archive was the literal document that expressed the rupture between nation and state engendered by the colonial form. The colonial archive was not just the record of the colonial state but also the repository of the sources for an imperial history whose public was in the metropole rather than the colony. Thus it was that anticolonial nationalist movements had to struggle not just to narrate alternative histories but to find different sources and authorities for the development of their national historiographies (Dirks 1990; Guha 1997).

The archive is the instantiation of the state's interest in history. It survives as the remains of the record rooms of everyday governmental business, and it is monumentalized by the state to preserve its own history in the assumed name of the nation (or colony) rather than the state (or metropole). The monument preserves much of its sacred legacy—with its hierarchical structures, its labyrinthine procedures, its professional cabals—enshrining the secularized state with the full solemnity of the past. As critics of history and historiography we must therefore chip away at the history of this monument, at the same time that we recognize the monumentality of all historical evidence and by implication the monumental limits and conditions of all historical writing. Historians may make their own history, but they cannot always make it as they choose. Historians make history in archives that already sediment an archaeology of the state—indeed an archaeology of history—that, perhaps necessarily, remains to this day largely unwritten.

Notes

This paper was originally prepared for a conference entitled "Early Modern History and the Social Sciences: Braudel's Mediterranean Fifty Years After," which took place in Bellagio, June 23–27, 1997. I am grateful to Naveeda Khan for research assistance concerning the history of European archives.

1 Grafton's fine book both traces the history of the footnote in modern historical writing and treats the complex and contested history of the documentary source for historical research. Grafton also notes that while Leopold Ranke proclaimed and propounded the place of the archive for history, he was neither the first to do so, nor by any means solely, if even principally, reliant on archival sources.

2 What follows in this chapter is mostly personal reflection about my own research based in the history of South Asia, hardly an adequate basis for the historicizing of the archive. Indeed, such a project would entail, at the very least, comprehensive and comparative historical research on different national archives, combined with reflec-

tion and critique, drawing from recent debates in the philosophy of history as well as methodological concerns of practicing historians. Unfortunately, historians often betray a serious reticence to combine these registers. I will comment on preliminary efforts in this direction in the final section of this paper.

3 Although I did my Ph.D. in a department of history, my advisor, Bernard S. Cohn, had originally been trained as an anthropologist and thus exposed his history students both to anthropology and its adherents.

4 I took my inspiration from Bernard Cohn, not only because of his witty and perceptive account of his fieldwork among historians (see Cohn, 1962), but because he questioned the nature and history of the colonial archive in terms of what he called a "colonial sociology of knowledge."

5 Archival science has been born out of the generally accepted mandate that the modern archive maintain records that satisfy two conditions, first that they were records of state administration, and second that they can be demonstrated to serve historical and administrative purposes distinct from the original one. See Jenkinson (1984).

6 As a result of the Public Records Act of 1838.

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