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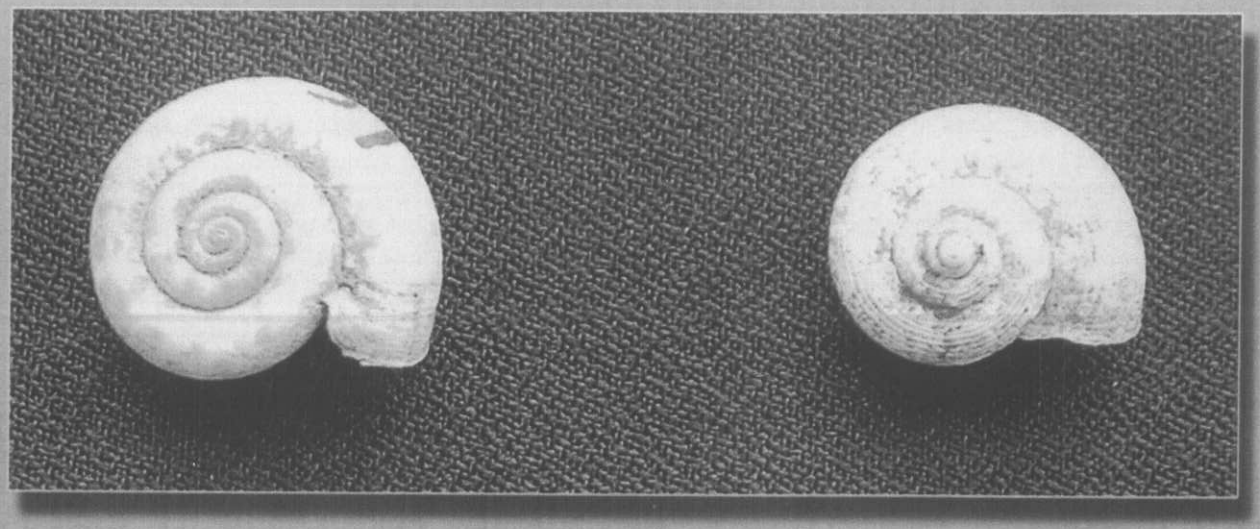

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For Jean-Claude Gardin: Archaeology and the Long Lineages of Tradition

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Abstract

This paper refers to a small body of work in order to scrutinize the way in which archaeologists of South Asia make inferences about long-enduring traditions. It suggests that archaeology, given its units and modes of analysis, may not be the social science that can give us a meaningful insight into traditions.

Introduction

I offer to Jean-Claude Gardin, in appreciation of his integrity, thoughts on a somewhat strange theme. (I dare to do so because of the understanding he shows when I think aloud on the relevance of our subject for modern times.) Why is it that archaeologists, who fancy themselves as 'scientists' dealing with tangible 'data'[1] – 'data' that can be counted, subjected to sampling, measured, and studied under the microscope — are so predisposed to the discovery of something as intangible as long-enduring Indian traditions, religious, social, or artisanal? I shall explore the notion of 'long lineages of tradition' (LLoT), taking, as a way into the subject, four studies[2] on ancient bead industries published between 1959 and 1991.

(1) In 1959 N.R.Banerjee described the remains of a bead-making workshop *c.* 200 B.C. at Ujjain. Observing Harappan parallels in the methods of flaking, grinding and drilling of stone for beads at the site, he concluded that 'the tradition of the art of bead making in Ujjain can claim to have its beginnings at the very dawn of civilisation on Indian soil' (Banerjee 1959: 195).

(2) In a paper rich in information and ideas, Allchin (1979: 97) wrote, regarding the manufacture of tools and ornaments of agate and carnelian in western India, that the manufacture of agate and carnelian beads 'far outlived the Harappan Culture. In chronological terms the next factory site to be excavated and discussed in some detail is that of Ujjain…'

(3) Studying the organisation of bead production at Khambhat today in order to interpret Harappan bead production, Kenoyer *et al.* (1991: 44) appear to independently arrive at a similar conclusion: that the history of modern bead production at Khambhat goes back to Harappan times. Many other scholars have stressed the hoary origins of 'the Indian carnelian bead industry', stating that 'the craft' now survives only at Khambhat, or that 'the technology has hardly changed'. This was the tenor of an excellent exhibition-cum-workshop at the Prince of Wales Museum of Western India in January 2000, *Present and Past: Stone Bead Making in India*, with modern and Harappan beads on display, where Mr. Inayat Agate of Khambhat giving several instructive demonstrations.

(4) In the fourth paper, which is on glass bead production, Francis (1991), finding striking similarities in the wasters from Arikamedu (200 B.C.-A.D. 200) and present-day Papanaidupet in Andhra Pradesh, inferred continuities in glass bead production between then and now that were facilitated by the migrations of bead makers.

Banerjee and Allchin see the Harappan bead making technology (2600-1800 B.C.) passing on to Ujjain (200 B.C.), and for them these are the first two documented stages of a lapidary tradition, 'many of [whose] processes are still employed today by the beadmakers of Gujarat' (Allchin 1979: 94). Allchin writes (1979: 104), 'There can be no reasonable doubt that the tradition is a continuous one'. There may have been some lapses, but 'the industry… can never have died out completely.' Since the 1970s we have come to know of second-millennium B.C. sites

1. The broken pots, bones, seals, or beads that we find do not truly constitute data, but data are extracted from the study of such finds.

2. It needs to be clarified that there is much that I admire in the work of all these scholars. No reason other than the availability of library materials in the IIAS at Shimla (where I first thought of this problem) has prompted my choice of these four papers for initiating the scrutiny of an idea.

such as Nagwada and Dher Majra, and first-millennium sites such as Bharuch, Kotalingala, Rajghat, Kodumanal, etc., that were also centres of bead production and either earlier than, or roughly contemporary with, the centre at Ujjain. However, it is less the factual veracity of the 'Harappa to Ujjain' sequence than the *form* of the argument — viz. archaeological evidence of 'a traditional Indian craft of bead production' (in the singular) that goes back to protohistoric times — that is at issue here. Is archaeology specially privileged to produce evidence of long craft traditions? If not, is the idea of the 'long lineages of tradition' an incidental by-product of the nature of archaeological evidence and analysis? Or does it spill out of the conceptual baggage that archaeologists carry about the antiquity and 'special character' of Indian civilisation?

Similarities and Differences in Stone Bead Production

Allchin (1979: 92, 94, 95) finds a Stone Age legacy in Harappan (and present-day) procedures of stone flaking for Harappan beads although she admits that in the Late Stone Age beads themselves were not made of stone. Also, Mackay (1943: 211) mentions the use of the bronze saw to cut blocks of stone in the Harappan period, and Stone Age methods of percussion or pressure flaking were not the only preparatory stage in Harappan bead production. The latter method produced pieces of stone with a convex bulb of percussion, whereas, as Allchin admits, sawing gives straight-sided pieces. The stones that Banerjee and Allchin studied, agate and carnelian (chalcedonies) are stones characterised by conchoidal fracture. But Harappan beads were also made of steatite, lapis lazuli, and other stones, and in Iron Age Ujjain there were soapstone, steatite, jade, and other beads. These stones lack a conchoidal fracture. For instance, lapis blocks would shatter if struck against each other, but do not receive much attention in the papers cited. In any case, it is also now known (Pelegrin 1994) that, in the pre-Harappan period, copper-tipped tools were used for pressure-flaking stone. As for the modern Khambhat technique, it uses iron pikes set at an angle in the ground, against which the stone nodule is held, to be struck with a horn mallet. Allchin (1979: 102) calls this a 'direct descendant' of a Palaeolithic technique. On January 18, 2000, Inayat Agate, master craftsman, allowed me to try this technique on rough pieces of carnelian. I was able to strike off small flakes with visible bulbs of percussion, but I had not been using any stone-age skill! Moreover, Pelegrin (1994: 597), after experimenting with this technique and closely examining Harappan stone flakes, thinks it unlikely that the use of bronze pikes prevailed in Harappan times. So the 'Stone Age legacy' is at best an indirect one.

Today near Ratanpur south of the lower Narmada river (Gujarat) carnelian is obtained at shallow depths in the lateritic soil of the locality, but earlier good agates were obtained at greater depths. Allchin (1979: 100-101) suggests that mining galleries have great antiquity in India, considering the 'continuity of so many basic techniques from Harappan times down to the present' and that some Harappan beads were of the finest carnelian. The fact that tribal people do the mining carries little historical significance. On a visit to the area I saw that this was not skilled work at all. Rough pits were dug, and lumps of stone were pulled out and heaped into piles. It was the contractor who chipped off the cortex of each stone to see if it was suitable to send off to Khambhat. The only significance of tribal labour that I could make out is the exploitation of tribal men and women for low daily wages.

A feature common to the Harappan and the Ujjain workshops is said to be the flat and grooved sandstone grinding slab, illustrated by Banerjee. This artefact has a published counterpart at Chanhu-daro (Mackay 1943: 213, p. XCIII.9) and is in use among the agate lapidaries of Khambhat.[3] However, the channel ovens of Ujjain, lined with clay and presumably packed with charcoal and dung to bake stones/beads packed into pots with mouths stopped with pebbles, are unknown at Harappan sites.

Harappan artisans used not only flint borers or jasper drills to perforate beads, but also cast bronze points (Mackay 1943: 186-7). Neither bronze drills nor drills in three graded sizes used sequentially on Harappan beads (as discovered by Inizan 1993:130), were found in Ujjain. The diamond drill set in the tip of a long steel tool that is hafted in wood and rotated with the use of a bow drill of Khambhat has a Harappan counterpart in jasper, according to Kenoyer *et al.* (1991: 54) but the hardness of the two kinds of stone is not the same. According to Francis (1991: 38) the diamond-tipped drill is first attested at Arikamedu.

Thus we find that there are not only similarities but also differences between the bead making processes of different eras and places in India, specifically between the Harappan (henceforth 'H') and Ujjain (henceforth 'U') industries. The paradigm of the 'long lineages of tradition' ('LLoT') could certainly accommodate some degree of change, but how should we total up similarities and differences to validate or refute the continuity of tradition from H to U? Does 60 per cent similarity satisfy the condition of continuity, or 78 per cent? And what weightage would we give various kinds of similarities/differences? Obviously, extensive comparison will not give us any respectable answers, and we must move to other kinds of reasoning.

A Tradition of Bead Making?

Many aspects of bead production, ancient and modern, can be explained by the demonstrable dictates of the raw

3. As demonstrated at *Present and Past: Stone Bead Making in India*, PoWM, Mumbai.

material, the availability of tools, and the rationality of workshop processes. Scholars have emphasised the fact that the heating of agate and carnelian pebbles is common to the Harappan and Ujjain techniques and to those of Khambhat today. Mr. Inayat Agate showed me unheated agate nodules containing moisture lines inside, which, he said, made them unsuitable for carving — they will not flake as one desires. Kenoyer *et al.* (1991: 50) appreciate this point. Also, heat treatment gives shaped beads a nice red colour. Is heating, then, part of a single hoary tradition born in 2500 B.C., or is it the rational response, of different craftsmen in different places and periods, to the properties of their raw material?[4] (Admittedly, the two are not mutually exclusive.) Again, I don't think there is anything remarkable about diverse workshops drilling beads from both ends: the further you drill into a bead, the more difficult it becomes to remain exactly in the centre, and it makes sense to move to the centre from each end of the bead.

There are considerations other than the technological. None of the ancient or modern beadmaking industrial centres has flourished for ever, which apparently obvious truth is rarely taken into account in the argument for enduring traditions. Ujjain, for instance, was continuously in occupation from about 750 B.C. to A.D. 1400, but the evidence for stone bead manufacture comes only from Period II and lower levels of Period III, or around 200 B.C. Only 3 complete beads come from Period I (750-500 B.C.) in the early Iron Age, and only 16 from Period II (500-200 B.C.), whereas more than 5000 beads were found in the lowest stratum of Period III (200 B.C.-A.D. 1400) (Banerjee 1959: 190-1). The ancient site of Nagara (Mehta 1968) is important for our discussion as it lies just 3 km north of Khambhat, but no scholar discusses the absence of evidence for bead production at Nagara through Periods I (iron age), II (late first millennium B.C.), III (first millennium A.D.), and IV (late medieval).[5] At Nagara, incidentally, agate and carnelian beads are as frequent/infrequent as beads of other stones, glass, and shell. As for Bharuch, another early site in the region, limited excavations revealed bead production in Period I (first millennium B.C.), but not in the first millennium A.D., nor in the medieval levels stratified above (IAR 1959-60: 19).

Further, neither Banerjee nor Allchin discuss the 1600-year gap between the bead industries of Harappa and Ujjain. What happened to this 'tradition' during that enormous span of time? Tradition is a social process and cannot be deep-frozen. So too, technology exists only in its practice. In preliterate societies people learn skills and knowledge by watching others at work, by helping, imitating their elders, internalising information and underlying principles, and developing manual dexterity. As far back as 1909 Coomaraswamy (1909: 54-56) had insisted that craft skill or 'technique is learnt in relation to real things and real problems' (see also Sigaut 1994). As Shils (1981: 14-15) puts it, 'Traditions are not independently self-reproductive or self-elaborating. Only living, knowing, desiring human beings can enact them and re-enact them and modify them.'

So where are the craftsmen who kept alive the Harappan tradition of bead production for those of Ujjain (or, for that matter, Kodumanal), to inherit? The most predictable answer is that, the archaeological record being a minute fraction of actual material life in the past, we have not as yet found the missing links. We shall revert to this point below, but first a scrutiny is required of the structure of the argument.

The Argument

The idea of the LLoT in the first two papers under scrutiny implies that H and U being so similar, and H being earlier than U, the two are connected by a continuous tradition (see figure below).

Certainly H and U are objectively perceived evidence, the actual vestiges of bead making that have been excavated and recorded. They are not dependent on my belief or yours, or U on belief in H. And there does exist a logical link between these vestiges and the idea of a tradition (henceforth, T) of bead making: in other words, H and U are 'appropriate' (Achinstein 1993: 322-4) to the concept

H is earlier than U

Ha, Hb, Hc… are paralleled by Ua, Ub, Uc…

Hence H … → →… (tradition) →… → … U

Or, if we were to find sites intermediate in space and time between H and U:

H..(tradition).. →H1..(tradition).. H2..→(tradition) …
U2..(tradition).. → U1..(tradition) →.. U

Or else, both H and U are evidence of a tradition: ↓

tradition
↓
/ \
H U

4. See also Inizan (1993: 121) on alleged continuity of flint-knapping techniques: the 'similarities are imposed by the materials themselves'.

5. Kenoyer and others's starting assertion that Khambhat has been an important bead production centre for 2000 years is, thus, somewhat inaccurate. In fact Khambhat's carnelian *exports* (there is no reference to an industry) are documented in the *Periplus* (1st century), and then only from the sixteenth century onwards (Allchin 1979: 98-101) when carnelian was being mined in the Ratanpura region. Allchin suggests that the immigrant Sidis 'revived' the carnelian industry at Ratan pura around AD 1300-1400.

of technological tradition. (As in other sciences, in archaeology we can connect tangible evidence with inferences of unobservable entities.)

We can also be confident that pre-industrial craft producers were not under pressure to continuously bring out novelties or to seek ways to increase output in relation to input costs. Skills and knowledge were handed down the generations by example or precept, learning depended on internalising, and production processes were repetitive. In this sense, pre-industrial crafts were certainly 'traditional'.

However, even if H and an unbroken 'T' are both true, U is likely, but not necessary — the Harappan lapidary tradition could have been transmitted to Kodumanal, not Ujjain. Neither is U evidence *that* H: the connection is tenuous. Therefore H and U are not the best evidence for either one particular unbroken T, or for the grand paradigm of the LLoT. 'T', if true, could connect H and U, but there is 'too much of a gulf' between the evidence and the inference (see Achinstein 1993: 334-5). True, there is the problem whether H, U, and Khambhat offer the best sampling of an assumed continuum. Do they represent the same population? Obviously the last of these samples has more content than the other two. But one has to work with what is available, and I am fully aware that the three entities may not represent the same population at all.[6]

As our starting comparisons and contrasts of H and U make it difficult to test the truth of T as the linking factor, it is difficult to grant T or the LLoT the status of hypotheses,[7] unless that term were to signify only a supposition accounting for some observations. Hypotheses in the true sense do not enter knowledge singly, but as parts of webs of knowledge and belief. They are theory laden and not exclusively empirical. They would have to follow from verified theories, say, about Indian craft history being structured on a set of old and unchanging traditions, or theories about the creation of skills in ancient workshops, theories that we do not have at hand. Besides, a hypothesis should be amenable to an empirical test.

Is LLoT a theory, then? a statement of general laws and principles? Theory accounts systematically for numerous subsets of archaeological remains, proposing underlying principles, assumptions, and definitions, causal connections, and subordinate and auxiliary hypotheses (about, say, the transmission of skills in workshops, the mobility of craftsmen, the range of tools and stones available, etc.). Theory is a 'map' of a complex real situation. And it specifies the criteria on which it can be shown to be false. All this means that for LLoT to be a theory, much background information is required. We need to know the social contexts of H and U, and of Khambhat's industry. At Khambhat are present the use of electrically powered saws and emery wheels, the purchase of raw material from contractors located in Ratanpur, wage labour, and, most important, the sale of the final product to unknown purchasers on the national market, features that could not have existed in the pre-industrial period. Surely, too, the mobility and migrations of craft producers, and the reasons for the latter, the sizes of artisan groups in various periods at a place, and access to and control over the (metal) tools of the craft, are all relevant to the notion of the LLoT.

The Harappan long barrel-shaped carnelian beads, like the miniature steatite beads, are not characteristic of later South Asian cultures (etched carnelian beads do occur at Kodumanal, but the beads there are of very small size) or of Mauryan, Sunga, or Kushana ornamentation (see Balakrishnan and Kumar 1999). Harappans did not wear only stone beads, in any event. There was a larger context comprising shell, copper, and stoneware bangles, gold leaf beads, long gold pins for the hair, faience beads and pendants, and so on. Let us not forget that, while the steatite bust of the 'Priest King of Mohenjo-daro' may have had a string of beads around the neck, the Dancing Girl wears three long bud-shaped pendants on a thick cord at her neck, and lots of bangles, but no beads. Moreover, in terms of sheer quantity, present-day preferences seem to be for the wearing of small black beads and I do not know how old this practice is.

In the absence of enquiry into the phenomena mentioned above, then, LLoT cannot be considered a theory — it remains curiously devoid of content or reference to people, contexts, periods, and places. And tradition, we had said, is a social process.

Perhaps LLoT is nothing more than a world-view or starting framework. In that case H → (*via* T) →U is only one of the possible ways of viewing the relationship between H and U. An alternative would be to see the parallels resulting from technological constraints. Or else, we could enquire into a structural relationship: are conditions behind Ha, Hb, and Hc (features of the Harappan bead technology) matched by the conditions behind Ua, Ub, Uc (similar features at Ujjain)? No such investigation exists, and it may not even be feasible. Why, then, do archaeologists choose the LLoT paradigm over all others in order to connect disparate and disjointed phenomena?

Archaeological Inference

Archaeology is about past cultures, but things social and cultural are neither directly observable nor 'hard facts'. We

6. I am grateful to Bob Middleton for this insight.

7. The following paragraphs concerning hypotheses, a priori beliefs, and theory, are based on a reading of Achinstein 1993; Ruben 1962 [1993]; Morton 1997; O'Hear 1989; Studdart-Kennedy 1975; and Williams 1995. It was necessary to incorporate this section as Dr. Ravi M. Singh, who heard an early draft of the paper, could not believe that ideas such as LLoT could appear in such a casual manner in archaeological reasoning.

approach social phenomena through material culture residues. Our professional specialisation is the study of knives, pots, seals, etc., which we classify and fit into typologies. We deal with classes of things — 'the bone arrowhead' or 'the scored goblet' — their form, co-occurrences, function, symbolism, change over time, material, etc. In the routines of analysis of our finds, in excavation reports and in museum displays, we would treat the bronze mirrors found in Harappan graves, say, as one form of ritual object, or a kind of bone artefact as weaponry, or else as a kind of hunting tool. To my knowledge, other than such understandings we have no well-developed theory of material culture to make our classes and subclasses meaningful in cultural terms.

Classification and typology being so fundamental (and characteristic of the discipline), one wonders if, in spite of the approaches of the new archaeologists and the post-processualists and their interest in economy, symbol, gender, etc., antiquarianism will ever be excised from our discipline. By antiquarianism I mean an interest in objects for their own sake and their aesthetic and museum value, as if they independently produce knowledge, without reference to a cultural context. Antiquarianism considers the place of the artefact in a series. Such antiquarianism has its implications. We spend so much time on type, detail, cataloguing, and comparing, that we stop just short of giving life to the things. We say that 'the Painted Grey Ware people knew iron'. A scholar then puzzles over why 'the Painted Grey Ware' people at a particular site were not using iron in the early levels of PGW. Almost inevitably, for Francis (in the fourth paper under scrutiny here) similarities in glass bead technology at seven sites across the Indo-Pacific area is related to the migrations of one group of artisans, over several centuries. Arikamedu as the earliest known site that has produced evidence for a particular method of drawing glass, is considered the place of origin of the glass workers, who emigrated when that centre was abandoned; in the tenth century, when the Cholas took Mantai in Sri Lanka (where such a technology is evidenced in the seventh century), 'the beadmakers moved back into India' (Francis 1991: 34-35). Thus for Francis the bead industry at Arikamedu, which was abandoned around A.D. 200, has a genetic link with that of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Papanaidupet. Archaeologists tend to ignore the notion of the 'under-determination of theory by data' (O'Hear 1989: 87-101) or the principle that a body of evidence need not have a logical relation to only one theory, even under laboratory conditions and the replication of 'events'.

In the midst of our preoccupation with excavated things, we tend to access matters social and cultural (craft specialisation, social ranking, forms of exchange, etc.) only by straying into other disciplines such as anthropology (see Gosden 1999) and history. Perhaps the danger in crossing disciplines lies in the ready acceptance of the ideas that appear in disciplines other than one's own without enquiring into how those ideas came into existence, and how they may be assessed for validity.

Consider also the exceptionally long units of time in archaeological periodisation. Period III at Ujjain, for instance, is dated 200 B.C. to A.D. 1300![8] Archaeological sequences are based on changes in the material equipment of everyday life (pottery, house form, other domestic equipment) that take place very slowly and rarely in tandem with political or social change. Changes in form in a particular type of artefact over such long periods makes us prone to think of slow and gradual change, and also filiation: that A (rough hand-made pottery), found in the lowest levels, 'begat' B (pottery of fine clays) in levels above, which in turn 'begat' C (wheel-turned pottery made of fine clays). Vertical sequences of artefact-types are read at face value without reference to their meanings, functions, or technological inputs. Thus potters' marks 'evolve' into writing, the amulet into the seal, and so on. Imbued as we are with the sense of gradual but inexorable change, we find a logic in the very sequence of forms. Likewise, we seek connections across sites and give these the most superficial of explanations.

And then there is the situation in which a very small fraction of past material cultures survives in the archaeological record. We let the rib of the pig speak for the pig, for pig rearing, and for the place of pork in the diet. More important, regarding the long place and time gap between H and U, we are habituated to absences of evidence. I myself have mapped the occurrence of carved stone cult vessels between the Euphrates and the Indus and assumed that the result was meaningful. One has learned to do without the missed or lost pieces, and those of unrecorded provenance. One has found no way of accommodating the possibility that carved cult vessels lie in unexcavated portions of sites or in hitherto undiscovered sites, and I have found myself dropping from distribution maps those sites of the relevant period that have not produced the artefact-type concerned, proceeding as if the known instances present a complete picture.

Perhaps, then, the crux of the propensity to the LLot paradigm is inadequate attention to absences of evidence. We do not ask what sort of new discovery will overthrow LLoT, for instance, future discoveries of sites between 1400 and 200 B.C. without beads or carnelian beads in particular, or with beads but not traces of local manufacture, and also sites where we do not expect bead production. Besides, all truths are not arrived at through tangible evidence. We know how 24 coconuts can be distributed amongst 6 people without having to physically verify the

8. Admittedly, this is not frequent, and the assigned chronology did cause comment in professional circles.

people and the coconuts. Sites excavated in the future may lack *the adequate conditions for* lapidary workshops: a minimum population, the requisite division of labour, the availability of agates and carnelian and metal for tools, opportunities for experimentation, etc. Truths that are based on reasoning — those that are deductively valid, or analytic truths (by definition) or necessary truths (the coconut distribution) (Morton 1997: 48-52) — may rule out bead industries altogether. Hence the critical question may be, not T or LLoT in themselves, but the social, economic, material, and political conditions that make for sustained lapidary traditions or LLoT. In other words, in order to link H and U we need a thick or rich conceptualisation of what lapidary traditions entail.

Tradition

The term tradition, as used by sociologists, anthropologists, and historians, is rich in content (see Shils 1981; Beteille 1997). Like culture, tradition outlives its individual practitioners, and in one sense all our cultural heritage falls under the rubric of 'tradition'. Yet Shils shows that tradition is not reducible to a sequence of like happenings. And it is not habit, even if a certain craft tradition engenders particular sorts of manual actions. Sequences of similar happenings amount to the practice of a tradition only when these are guided or prompted by sustained norms or values — that is, when there is continuity of belief. Concerning craft traditions, Shils (1981: 83) points out that the repetitive production of similar artefacts through the performance of recurrent tasks is dependent on a body of knowledge of how those tasks may best be done. It is not just the tool that counts, but how it is to be used. '"Know-how" is the *traditum* of general, unarticulated categories and expectations, it is the tradition of a code, of a set of signals which only experienced eyes and ears refined by tradition can discern…' (Shils 198: 85). No society is wholly bound by tradition, and no culture is devoid of traditions.

We could infer a continuing lapidary tradition if certain substances, colours, shapes, and sheen were valued over others; if we found that ancient craftsmen valued the old ways and nurtured a body of workshop lore; and that there was a continuing aesthetic of the body and its adornment. Yet, not only are the Harappan beads different in size and shape from those at Ujjain, the work of Lad (1979) and Deo (2000) shows that carnelian as a substance was not particularly prized in the Rigveda (where pearls and gold are valued), or *Arthashastra* (where beryl, coral, pearls, rock crystal, etc. are mentioned, but not, to my knowledge, carnelian), the Jatakas (diamonds, rubies, pearls, crystal, etc.), or in the *Mahabharata* (beryl, coral, and pearls were the only gems worn on the body, strung sometimes on gold, according to Lad). We also know that precious substances buried in early Buddhist reliquaries comprised steatite-schist, pearls, crystal, garnet, and amethyst, but not carnelian or agate. According to Deo, agate beads became popular only in medieval times in association with some practices of popular Islam.

It is well known that the seeds of the idea of Indian civilisation being dominated by Tradition (in contrast to dynamism, revolution, or innovation) were sown in the colonial era as the West attempted to understand Indian judicial customs, revenue systems, religion, and polity. That archaeologists should cling uncritically to this notion, however, when several historians have refuted it in the last thirty years or so, is strange.[9]

LLoT is not only a vacuous notion, it leads to essentialising statements.[10] It is understandable that those who feel threatened by the power of the West may take refuge in imagined traditions of the past, especially in the face of major social changes brought about by urbanisation and industrialisation. The LLoT notion not only implies that India has the prerogative on tradition (to my mind, many traditions of classical music and civil society in Europe could be our envy), but becomes a dangerous kind of reasoning for those who feel threatened by the self-assertion of the hitherto oppressed sections of Indian society and insist that constitutionalism is alien to 'our traditions'.

In conclusion, I do not think that archaeologists are in any position to make assertions about hoary traditions. Much thinking and understanding of tradition has come from philosophy, sociology, and recent history — but not from the scraps, discards, garbage tips, forgotten caches, or unswept floors of the archaeological record.

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9. To take just one instance, C.J. Fuller realized as far back as 1977 that the imposition of the British revenue system brought about a sea change in village society, so that 'what anthropologists are prone to call "traditional India" is, in fact, British India' (Fuller 1977: 107).

10. Allchin states (1979: 91) for instance, that the agate and carnelian industries are as integral to being Indian as are cotton fabric and the bullock cart.

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