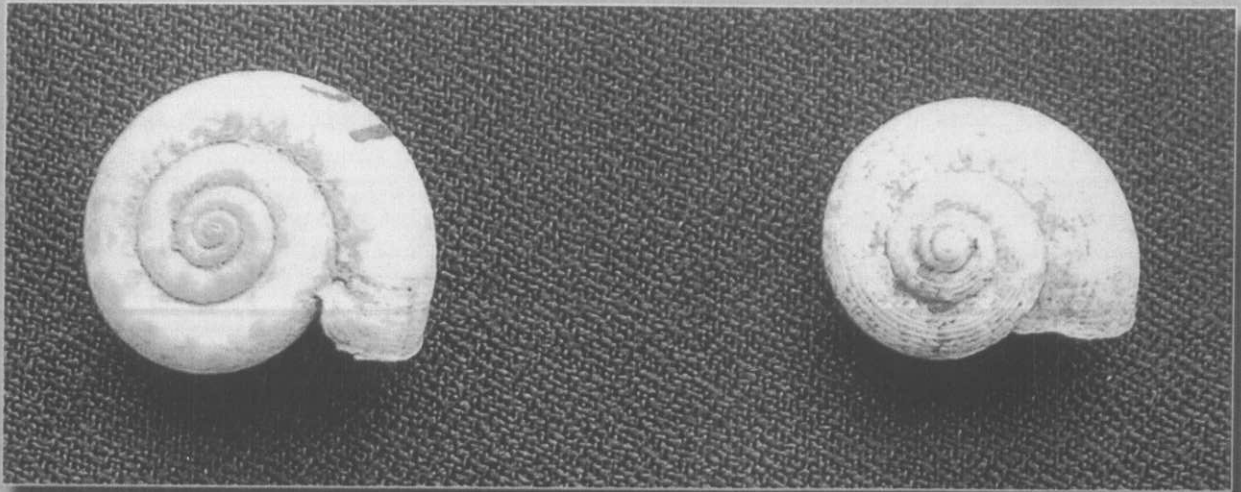


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For Jean-Claude Gardin: Archaeology and the Long Lineages of Tradition

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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 studies² 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 IAS at Shimla (where I first thought of this problem) has prompted my choice of these four papers for initiating the scrutiny of an idea.