

# **THE RUINS OF EMPIRE:**

## **British Responses to Ruins in Colonial India**

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The different and changing meanings of the ruined form in the European consciousness point to its position as a discursive space, expressed in ideas of a ‘ruin motif’. However, most historical investigations into ruins have been concerned with classical structures in the European context. This thesis examines the operations of the ruin motif in the setting of nineteenth century-colonial India through a study of John Benjamin Seely’s travel text *The Wonders of Elora* (1824) and James Fergusson’s *The History of Architecture in All Countries* (1874). It argues that the ruin motif was an important means by which the aims, difficulties and tensions in colonial discourses were articulated.

## INTRODUCTION

Ruins have played a singular role in the European historical, cultural and political imagination. They have been subject to veneration and memorialisation in art, photography, poetry and prose. In the romantic and picturesque aesthetic they held a pleasurable melancholy as monuments to human mortality and the ravages of time. Ruins were accorded sublime status through their unique alignment with both the man-made and the natural; as William Gilpin wrote, ‘We consider ... [the ruin] as a work of nature, rather than art.’<sup>1</sup> Ruins were also inextricably linked with history through physically embodying it; according to Walter Benjamin, ‘In the ruin history has physically merged into the setting.’<sup>2</sup> The experience of ruins became fertile ground for the imposition of political and cultural meanings. To the antiquarian of eighteenth century Britain, ruins represented the moral lessons of history. Ruins were also the means by which societies interpreted and reclaimed the civilisations and heritages of the past. All these qualities testify to the position of ruins as inherently imagined entities. Benjamin wrote of ruins as ‘allegories of thinking.’<sup>3</sup> At their centre is a loss and absence which invites narrative and symbolic reconstruction. This inherently allegorical quality means that personal and collective imaginings, aspirations and identities can be valuably discerned through a study of how ruins are conceptualised.

Most historical investigations into how ruins functioned as sites upon which contested cultural, intellectual and political ideas were displayed have been concerned with classical structures. The fascination with Greco-Roman ruins from the fifteenth century onwards profoundly shaped the way ruins were imagined as aesthetic and cultural entities. However, this period also witnessed the opening up of non-European frontiers for travellers and

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<sup>1</sup> As quoted in Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquarians: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-century Britain* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004), p. 298.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, (New York: Verso, 1977), p. 177.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

administrators. In the Middle East and Asia, Europeans increasingly came into contact with not only foreign peoples and cultures, but also their ruins.

In 1950, the French academic Raymond Schwab referred to Europe's renewed scientific and scholarly engagement with the East in during the nineteenth century as the 'Oriental Renaissance'.<sup>4</sup> He argued for its parallel with the European Renaissance as well as the way it undermined the Greco-Roman cultural and intellectual terrain which 'made the world, for the first time in human history, a whole.'<sup>5</sup> However, a curious anomaly in this conceptualisation is the lack of admiration for the 'plastic arts' produced by Eastern cultures, including monuments and esoteric religious and cultural iconography.<sup>6</sup> Nigel Leask referred to the 'associative vacuum' that characterised encounters with Eastern structures, the unfamiliar forms of Hindu and Buddhist ruins often fitting uncomfortably with the 'Greco-Roman topography' of the European mind.<sup>7</sup> However, rather than mere dismissal or denigration, the relation of Europeans to these structures was complex and multi-faceted.

This thesis will examine the dynamics of Britain's engagement with Asia during the nineteenth century through the study of written and artistic responses to Eastern ruins by British travellers and residents. This approach fundamentally conceives of ruins as the 'allegories of thinking' through which the anatomy of a given culture can be accessed. The physical remains of ancient Hindu civilisations presented to the British the primary case of aesthetic incongruity but paradoxically incited almost obsessive fascination.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, Buddhist structures and iconography were more readily praised and easily assimilated into the classical aesthetic. The European approach to these Eastern structures was vitally

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<sup>4</sup> Raymond Schwab, trans. Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pp. 479-481.

<sup>7</sup> Nigel Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing, 1770-1840: 'From an Antique Land'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 1.

framed by pre-existing frameworks, namely the classical and the romantic. The juxtaposition of these two tradition of responses will be used to deconstruct the cultural and political processes involved in aesthetic constructions.

In doing so, my research will draw upon and contribute to the approach adopted by historians who view aesthetic culture as a discourse inextricably linked to the making of political, social and national selfhood, as in Dana Arnold's *Cultural Identities and the Aesthetics of Britishness*, or Elizabeth Bohl's *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics, 1716-1818*.<sup>9</sup> It will argue that the characterisation of Western responses to the East during the nineteenth century as a second, 'Oriental Renaissance' is accurate to a certain extent. While there was integration and even assimilation, Europeans for the most part nevertheless engaged in a process of selection, elision and recasting to fashion a version of the East that was palatable to the European sensibility. The process by which this occurred ultimately will reveal the processes and instabilities of the colonial enterprise.

Schwab has made the case for an upheaval in the cultural and intellectual terrain of the West upon contact with the texts and monuments of ancient Asian civilisations. Subsequent historians, such as John Drew and Soumyendra Mukherjee, have questioned Schwab's vision of cultural assimilation, instead stressing anxiety, disorientation and resistance.<sup>10</sup> This approach has also been adopted in studies of encounters between religions, especially in the experiences of Christian missionaries.<sup>11</sup> However, many of these works have focused on literature and art in which representations of the East by Europeans are analysed

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<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth A. Bohls (1995), *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics, 1716-1818* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press; Dana Arnold, ed., *Cultural Identities and the Aesthetics of Britishness* (New York: Palgrave, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> John Drew, *India and the Romantic Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Soumyendra Nath Mukherjee, *Sir William Jones: A Study in Eighteenth-century British Attitudes to India* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

<sup>11</sup> J. Jeffrey Franklin, *The Lotus and the Lion: Buddhism and the British Empire* (Ithaca, N.Y. : Cornell University Press, 2008); Geoffrey A. Oddie, *Imagined Hinduism : British Protestant Missionary Constructions of Hinduism, 1793-1900* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006); Benita Parry, *Delusions and Discoveries: Studies on India in the British Imagination, 1880-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

through Saidian power paradigms. These studies often neglected the vital materiality of the British engagement with Asia in the nineteenth century. The conceptual, literary and fantasy encounters about the East gave way to first-hand ones as more travellers gained access to what had previously been the preserve of a few explorers and traders. The new scientific paradigm, accompanied by the rise of archaeology, ethnography and the natural sciences, further emphasised the importance of the material remains and built structures of foreign cultures.

My thesis will attempt to reinstate the role of physical, first-hand encounters in both reflecting and modifying the way the East was imagined. This theme is addressed in texts such as Partha Mitter's *Much Maligned Monsters: History of European Reactions to Indian Art*, and Janice Leoshko's *Sacred Traces: British Explorations of Buddhism in South Asia*.<sup>12</sup> However, the role of the classical and romantic heritage that framed British reactions are only briefly covered in these works. The difference in the ways these two traditions of ruins were conceptualised by various sources is critically revealing of the cultural dynamics that shaped them.

My primary source material centres upon two works conceived around the experience of Indian ruins, namely John B. Seely's *The Wonders of Elora* (1825) and James Fergusson's *A History of Architecture in all Countries* (1874).<sup>13</sup> Written at very different points of British intellectual, commercial and administrative engagement with Asia and the Indian sub-continent, these works will be used to track changes and continuities across time.

Chapter 1 will explore the role of ruinous forms as inherently discursive spaces. The shifting role of ruins as historical, archaeological and symbolic entities points to the existence of a 'ruin motif', a conceptual framework within which these meanings are articulated. The

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<sup>12</sup> Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters*; Janice Leoshko, *Sacred Traces: British Explorations of Buddhism in South Asia* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> John B. Seely, *The Wonders of Elora* (London: Geo. B. Whittaker, 1825); James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (London: Murray, 1876).

ways this motif has functioned throughout history will be investigated to reveal the classical and romantic traditions of conceiving ruins. The thematic patterning set out in this section in the treatment of the ruin motif will be employed by subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 will explore the ways Eastern ruins served as imagined entities upon which romantic ideas were displayed and manipulated. Specifically, this will be achieved through a study of John B. Seely's *The Wonders of Elora* (1825), the first popular account of the Ellora cave temples. Seely's text displayed the romantic predilection for ruins as primarily aesthetic and imaginative entities above temporal, theological or archaeological concerns. The author's quest for a synthesis between the self and nature was found in the Elora ruins as human endeavours fashioned through a natural rock formation. However, Seely was by no means an idealist romantic figure or a Flaubertian sensualist in search of the Exotic. At the time of *The Wonders of Elora*'s publication, he was a Captain of the Bombay Native Infantry and had previously held a post as a military secretary to the vice-president of the Indian Supreme Government. At its core, Seely's book was an imperialistic work which employed the ruin motif to re-orientate Britain's national destiny to the regions of her empire.

Chapter 3 will reveal the changes in response to Eastern ruins as representing the triumph of positivism over romanticism from the mid-nineteenth century. This will be done through a study of James Fergusson's *A History of Architecture in all Countries* (1876), an architectural tract on Indian ruins which framed the scientific method as the antidote to the 'cataclysms and convulsions' of romanticism. The renewal of Enlightenment principals in this work saw the admiration for Buddhist structures above Hindu ones, their harmony and simplicity of form representing for Fergusson the classical world view. This aspect was accompanied by a shift from an intuitive mode of interaction with ruins to one defined by physicality, exactitude and quantitative appraisal. By embedding such a meditation in this

volume of his architectural series, Fergusson reiterated the role of ruins as the site upon which contested cultural, intellectual and political ideas were displayed.



## Chapter 1: The Ruin Motif

The pillars of Nature's temple are alive

And sometimes yield perplexing messages;

Forests of symbols between us and the shrine,

Remark our passage with accustomed eyes.

-Charles Baudelaire, *Correspondences*<sup>14</sup>

Since the fifteenth century, ruins have accrued a myriad of meanings and interpretations. They have variously assumed positions as archaeological, political, aesthetic and symbolic entities. These different and shifting meanings suggest the role of the ruined form as an inherently discursive space. At the centre of ruins is a productive void, their unknown quality provoking an interminable chain of interpretations. Underlying the various conceptions of ruins as site, symbol, function or form is a kind of 'ruin motif', a thematic framework within which the meanings of these structures take shape.

The composition of the ruin motif at different points in time is deeply subject to historical processes. Many studies into the features and operations of the ruin motif have approached the subject from a purely aesthetic standpoint.<sup>15</sup> However, the awareness of ruins as a cultural artefact is ultimately dependent upon a society's attitude towards temporality, history and posterity. As Michel Makarius has argued, 'the ruin was an impossible concept

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<sup>14</sup> Charles Baudelaire, 'Correspondences', in Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil and Other Poems of Charles Baudelaire*, trans. Francis Duke (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 1961), p. 47.

<sup>15</sup> See Paul Zucker, 'Ruins: An Aesthetic Hybrid', in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 20, no. 2 (Winter, 1961), pp. 119-130; Florence M. Hetzler, 'Ruin Time and Ruins' in *Leonardo*, 21, no. 1 (1988), pp. 51-55; Florence M. Hetzler, 'The Aesthetics of Ruins: A New Category of Being', in *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 16, no. 2 (Summer, 1982), pp. 105-108; Karen Lang, 'The Dialectics of Decay: Rereading the Kantian Subject' in *The Art Bulletin*, 79, no. 3 (1997), pp. 413-439; Robert Ginsberg, *The Aesthetics of Ruins* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004).

before the Renaissance...apportioned human destiny into past, present, and future.’<sup>16</sup>

Certainly, the vital role of historical circumstance is suggested in the appreciation of ruins in each period being based on very different principals. The early appreciation of ruins was largely grounded in their value as historical, archaeological and architectural artefacts, while the eighteenth century emphasised their aesthetic and symbolic potential.<sup>17</sup>

Two main traditions emerge when the role of history is reinstated in the study of ruins, namely the classical and the romantic.<sup>18</sup> Both have found expression through the manipulation of key strands within the ruin motif. These include the attitude to the void at the centre of ruins, the tension between the physical and aesthetic realms, and the productive interplay between the natural and the man-made.

### **The Void**

The history of the ruin motif has been firstly underlined by the different and changing responses to the void at the centre of ruins. Unique amongst architectural formations, the ruin derives its formal properties from what is absent, lost and incomplete. While acquiring throughout history a variety of significations, it is in their irresolution that ruins compel the production of meaning. The gaps in their physical and conceptual fabric invite interpretation but resist resolution. Implicit in the viewer’s relation to this void is also the attitude towards the internal and external unity of ruins.

The classical vision aimed at filling in the semantic void to restore the original unity of ruins. In devising a working definition for ruins as an aesthetic category, Florence M. Hetzler stressed the intactness of the original conception, ‘A ruin is the disjunctive product of

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<sup>16</sup> Michel Makarius, trans. David Radzinowicz, *Ruins* (Paris: Flammarion, 2004), p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Makarius, *Ruins*, pp. 7-15.

<sup>18</sup> Ginsberg, ‘Theories of Ruin’, in Ginsberg, *The Aesthetics of Ruins*, pp. 315-334.

the intrusion of nature upon the human-made without loss of the unity that our species produced.’<sup>19</sup> However, this could be described as only one tradition in the history of responses to ruins, namely the classical one. The classical aesthetic displayed a drive towards unity and completeness most evident in ideas of beauty being a single, shared universal, or ‘form’.<sup>20</sup> This idea fit into a larger philosophical system, Plato’s rationale for believing in a single transcendental form of beauty similarly applied to other forms, such as justice.<sup>21</sup> The revival of classicism during the Enlightenment period saw the appreciation of Greco-Roman structures as examples of classical balance and harmony.<sup>22</sup>

In this intellectual milieu, the sense of loss elicited by ruins invited narrative and archaeological reconstruction. The kind of unity desired was the external one of the ruin’s original form composed of the physical and cultural transmissions of ancient civilisations. ‘What is the antique in Rome,’ wrote the French archaeologist Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy in 1796, ‘if not a great book whose pages have been destroyed or ripped out by time, it being left to modern research to fill in the blanks?’<sup>23</sup> Consequently, Rome and its ruins became fodder for the classificatory impulse of the Enlightenment. Generations of archaeologists, architects and artists flocked to the ancient capital to draw, measure and catalogue its ancient vestiges.’<sup>24</sup> In this way, the classical attitude sought to rectify the ambiguities of ruins and restore their original unity.

By contrast, the value of the ruin in the romantic consciousness lay not in what remained, but what was lost, absent and incomplete. Romanticism as, in part, a reaction against the rationalism of the Enlightenment was accompanied by the undercutting of its

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<sup>19</sup> Hetzler, ‘Ruin Time and Ruins’, p. 51.

<sup>20</sup> Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present Day: A Short History* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), p. 39.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p. 40.

<sup>22</sup> Makarius, *Ruins*, p 72.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Makarius, *Ruins*, p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Michel Makarius, *Ruins*, p 58.

classical aesthetic. According to Michel Makarius, ‘To the ideals ... adhering to the classically beautiful, the Sublime opposes [through] expressions of excess, boundless forms, contradictory concepts, a desire to represent the infinite.’<sup>25</sup> Like classicism, romanticism also contained an all-encompassing ‘thrust to unity’, the synthesis between the interior and exterior worlds manifesting in the ‘pantheism in religion, of synaesthesia in art, of democracy in politics’.<sup>26</sup> However, while striving towards a universalist vision, romanticism also accommodated the void at the centre of that conceptual ideal.<sup>27</sup> In his work on the Romantic Movement, Thomas McFarland argued for a ‘diasparactive triad’ in which ideas of incompleteness, fragmentation and ruin were at the very heart of romanticism itself.<sup>28</sup> Coleridge wrote, ‘My mind feels as if it *ached* to behold and have something great - something one and indivisible.’<sup>29</sup> The romantic longed and quested for a unified ideal but reality was inherently fragmented, ‘diasparactive forms ... permeate the human situation.’<sup>30</sup> Rather than a refutation, this was seen as a ‘necessary complement’ to ideas of romantic unity, the ‘reverse of that coin’s obverse.’<sup>31</sup> ‘The existence of so powerful a need [for unity],’ argued McFarland, ‘suggests that the situation actually obtaining must be the contrary of unity: that is, one of fragmentation’.<sup>32</sup> While striving for unity, romanticism here also acknowledged the fundamental incompleteness and void at the centre of the rational universe espoused by the Enlightenment.

This dual dynamic could be seen in the ‘pleasurable melancholy’ romantics found in ruinous forms. The romantic conception of ruins was a deeply internalised one. While ruins

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<sup>25</sup> Michel Makarius, *Ruins*, p 81.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> McFarland, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin*, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas McFarland, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Modalities of Fragmentation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 5-8.

<sup>29</sup> Coleridge to John Thelwall, 14 October, in *Collected Letters*, vol. 1, ed. E. L. Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956-71), p. 349.

<sup>30</sup> McFarland, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin*, p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xii.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

suggested transience, destruction and decay, they also contained an expression of the self, ‘We too are subject to ruin.’<sup>33</sup> Romantic poets in the nineteenth century such as Lord Byron found in ruins a metaphor for themselves as refugees from the destabilising forces of modernity.<sup>34</sup> In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, the poem's protagonist declared that he went to Italy to be ‘a ruin amidst ruins.’<sup>35</sup> William Blake's protagonists in *Jerusalem*, while observing the structural devastations of Luvah, ‘looked on one-another & became what they beheld’.<sup>36</sup> The figurative potential of ruins in these instances provided a poetic sanctuary for the romantic consciousness. The ravages inflicted by time were no longer in need of remedy, but venerated. The conceptual potency of ruins was in this way pivoted upon the void at the centre of these structures.

The ‘taste for decay’ in the appreciation of ruins also suggested an attitude towards the unity of ruins that was very different to the classical one. As an English eighteenth-century writer remarked, ‘ruins ... suggest the sublimities which the complete intact building has not attained.’<sup>37</sup> In undergoing the process of decay, ruins gained something greater than the sum of its original parts. This process rendered ruins not only temporally but conceptually removed from their intact manifestation, transitioning into a ‘new category of being’.<sup>38</sup> As opposed to the unity of the original valued by the classical tradition, romanticism aimed for a new unity. Paul Zucker's conceptualisation could be seen to best illustrate this idea in the concept of an ‘inner unity’.<sup>39</sup> The marriage of the physical and the immaterial within ruins was said to consist of the ‘original architectural concept’, ‘the mass and voids ... [and their]

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<sup>33</sup> Ginsberg, *The Aesthetics of Ruins*, p. 98.

<sup>34</sup> Alexandar Bradley, *Ruskin and Italy* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1987), p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage and Other Romantic Poems* (California: Dent, 1978), p. 220.

<sup>36</sup> As quoted in Anne Janowitz, *England's Ruins: Poetic Purpose and the National Landscape* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1990), p. 9.

<sup>37</sup> As quoted in Zucker, ‘Ruins: An Aesthetic Hybrid’, p. 130.

<sup>38</sup> Hetzler, ‘The Aesthetics of Ruins: A New Category of Being’, p. 105.

<sup>39</sup> Zucker, ‘Ruins: An Aesthetic Hybrid’, p. 130.

relation to the surrounding space.’<sup>40</sup> Rather than original unity, the romantic ruin was a structure of both the original and the unintended.

### **Physical/Aesthetic**

The history of the ruin motif has also been marked by the tension between the material and aesthetic spheres. On one hand, ruins are physical, man-made structures consisting of spatial, stylistic and architectural properties. They are the physical means by which the institutions of ancient civilisations are transmitted through time. This renders ruins deeply historical texts and their objective study enriching to the sum of human knowledge. On another level, ruins are also aesthetic entities removed from their original function and meaning. The Parthenon is not primarily conceived in modern times as a temple of religious worship, but an archetypal ruinous form. In this respect, ruins can be aestheticized and employed symbolically in the spheres of art, poetry and literature.

The classical tradition regarding ruins was foregrounded by their vital materiality. When ruins first emerged in the cultural consciousness in the fifteenth century, they were primarily seen as physical repositories of knowledge. According to Michel Makarius, ‘Words carved in stone now competed with ideas transmitted in books’ so that ‘archaeological science and book knowledge would be reconciled and complement one another.’<sup>41</sup> The fixed meanings of ruins were here accessed through their physical fabric. The tablets, carvings, pillars and stone edifices that constituted ruinous forms were historical texts to be, sometimes literally, read and deciphered. Even when depicted artistically, ruins as conceived within a classical framework strictly consisted of form and physicality. The works of classically-orientated French painter Nicolas Poussin, composed in the first half of the seventeenth century, was greatly illustrative of this tendency. In his ‘heroic landscape’ paintings, Poussin

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Makarius, *Ruins*, p. 7.

often employed ruins in the foreground to geometrically establish harmony between the horizontals and verticals of the overall composition.<sup>42</sup> No recourse was made to the aesthetic potential of ruins to evoke atmosphere, sentiment or moral instruction. Another example was the copper engravings of Athens by James Stuart and Nicholas Revett in the mid-eighteenth century which depicted ruins in a factual documentary style.<sup>43</sup>

The romantic consciousness conceived of ruins as primarily aesthetic entities temporally removed from historical, cultural and religious significations. The position of ruins as de-contextualised structures was vividly exemplified in the eighteenth-century fashion for erecting fake ruins in English landscape gardens.<sup>44</sup> In contrast with the formal, ‘classical French park’, the English garden was characterised by a love for an untamed, picturesque aesthetic, a prelude to the romantic tradition.<sup>45</sup> According to Christopher Hussey, ‘the picturesque interregnum between classic and romantic art was necessary in order to enable the imagination to form the habit of feeling through the eyes’.<sup>46</sup> In this respect, fake ruins could be seen as the elevation of sensibility and sensation above historical and archaeological authenticity. In *Observations on Modern Gardening* (1770), Sir Thomas Whately explicated this mentality, ‘It is true that such effects properly belong to real ruins; but they are produced in a certain degree by those which are fictitious; the impressions ... are exactly similar; and the representation ... suggests subjects to the imagination.’<sup>47</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>42</sup> Zucker, ‘Ruins: An Aesthetic Hybrid’, p. 122.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>44</sup> See David Stewart, ‘Political Ruins: Gothic Sham Ruins and the ‘45’ in *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 55, no. 4 (Dec., 1996), pp. 400-411; (Kenneth Clark, *The Gothic Revival* (London, 1964), p. 37; Michel Baridon, ‘Ruins as a Mental Construct’ in *Journal of Garden History*, 5 (January-March 1985), pp. 84-96.

<sup>45</sup> Christopher Hussey, *The Picturesque* (London, Cass, 1967), p. 4.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Thomas Whately, *Observations on Modern Gardening* (London: T. Payne, 1771), p. 139.

eighteenth century aesthetic tracts in general tended to be consumed by the ability of structures such as ruins to elicit a sense of wonder, novelty, or curiosity.<sup>48</sup>

The archetypal and symbolic use of ruins in the romantic tradition further rendered them conceptual, aesthetic entities. This aspect could be glimpsed in the way ruins have been depicted in art and literature. The seeds of the romantic use of ruins could already be seen in the Mannerist and Baroque artistic traditions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>49</sup> Decayed columns, engravings and encroaching vegetation were here used to evoke atmosphere.<sup>50</sup> Ruins were also used for their metaphorical, rather than historical, value in literature and poetry.<sup>51</sup> In all these artistic and literary depictions, argued Robert Ginsberg, ‘Ruins of least value to the romantic attitude are those that are neat, clean, devoid of vegetation, carefully signposted, ... caused by human agency, ... and cursed with clear skies or gentile climate.’<sup>52</sup> The existence of such an archetypal ideal underlined the position of romantic ruins as aesthetic configurations rather than historical artefacts.

### **Man-made/Natural**

The last strand of the ruin motif that will be addressed is the varying associations made with the man-made and the natural. Ruins can firstly be conceived as the architectural, artistic and technological creations of ancient civilisations. In this respect, ruins are aligned with the man-made and the cultural, religious and political interests that conspired in their construction. On the other hand, ruins can be seen as a product of nature rather than man. The ruined form is here essentially the product of destructive weather and natural decay.

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<sup>48</sup> Hussey, *The Picturesque*, pp. 18-22.

<sup>49</sup> Makarius, *Ruins*, pp. 16-42.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>51</sup> See the works of the philosopher Third Earl Anthony Ashley Cooper Shaftesbury (1671- 1713), Joseph Addison (1672-1719), Alex-ander Pope (1688-1744), Thomas Gray (1716-1771), and Thomas Wharton (1747).

<sup>52</sup> Ginsberg, *The Aesthetics of Ruins*, p. 319.



The classical conception of ruins resolutely aligned these structures with the man-made. They were testaments to the ingenuity of past civilisations that had triumphed over time by way of their physical remains. Consequently, ruins were deeply contextualised structures, subject to the particular historical circumstances that shaped their original construction. The study of their historical, religious and cultural origins was consequently accorded the imperatives of objectivity and accuracy. The foremost pioneer of this approach was art-historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann who regarded Greek models as the standard to which all western art should conform.<sup>53</sup> His theories were underlined by the need to study ancient ruins accurately through archaeological and scientific methodologies.

The strong emphasis on the original authorship of ruins was accompanied by a profound vision of lineage between the present and the ancient builders of Greco-Roman ruins. Enlightenment thinkers in the eighteenth century turned to classical civilisations as the reference points for secular, humanist values. Classical ruins were seen as the documents of a newly revered pagan past upon which these values were based.<sup>54</sup> As a consequence, the ruins of Greece and Rome were venerated as the physical expression of these traditions.

By contrast, the romantic vision conceived of ruins as de-historicised structures removed from the realm of the man-made. Instead, ruins were seen as being the products of nature, their formation the result of encroaching vegetation and natural decay. According to William Gilpin, the chief theorist of the picturesque, ‘We consider ... [the ruin] as a work of nature, rather than art.’<sup>55</sup> Consequently, artists from the eighteenth century generally depicted ruins embedded within natural landscapes rather than as stand-alone pieces of architecture. This configuration was invariably accompanied by menacing natural elements such as dark

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<sup>53</sup> Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Writings on Art*, ed. David Irwin (London: Phaidon, 1972).

<sup>54</sup> Zucker, ‘Ruins: An Aesthetic Hybrid’, p. 120.

<sup>55</sup> As quoted in Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquarians: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-century Britain* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004), p. 298.

clouds, thunder and dust to further align ruins with nature.<sup>56</sup> The strength of this association was epitomised in nature itself being conceived by romantics as a ruin. ‘Under closer examination, the Earth seems more like an old ruin than a modern and regular place ... whence comes then this appalling disorder on the surface, in the bowels of the Earth?’ wondered the German theologian Johann Karl Kruger in the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>57</sup> In the visual arts, geological and natural phenomena were also depicted in a way that resembled ruinous forms. In Caster David Friedrich’s famous oil painting *Das Eismeer (The Sea of Ice)*, 1824), an iceberg more resembled the jumbled marble slabs of a ruined building than a natural glacier.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, in describing his artistic study titled ‘Draft Physiognomy of Mountains’ (1834), the painter Gustav Carus wrote that the granite rocks soared upward ‘like ruined towers and walls.’<sup>59</sup>

### **National Ruins**

Within this symbolic matrix, the reconfiguration of a particular set of ruins represented the expression of cultural and national identity. In *England’s Ruins*, Anne Janowitz made the observation that the image of the ruin often appeared when a sense of ‘Britishness’ was evoked in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>60</sup> The significance of this phenomenon could be seen in the context of this period as a time in which the idea of ‘Britain’ as a homogenous nation-state was being forged and negotiated. Competing class, regional, and ideological interests needed to be reconciled through the construction of a common history and identity. In the process of forming one of Benedict Anderson’s ‘Imagined Communities’, ‘nation was conceived in more genealogical than geographical

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<sup>56</sup> Makarius, *Ruins*, p. 140.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 137.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Janowitz, England’s Ruins*, p. 2.

terms'.<sup>61</sup> Domestic ruins suggested an ancient lineage that tied the peoples of Britain together through a common historical root. Concurrently, classical ruins were the physical manifestations of the cultural inheritance of Britain as a nation. Setting foot on Italian soil was in this way a kind of homecoming, a return to the place in which their ideas, civilisation and selfhood had been formulated. This saw the ruins of Rome and Greece being integrated into ideas of nationhood and the Grand Tour a pilgrimage to Britain's cultural and spiritual homeland.

The following chapters will address this dynamic in the context of British India during the nineteenth century. This period was a time of major upheavals in the British national psyche in the attempted to forge a global empire. The processes by which this occurred will be accessed through a study of how Indian ruins were conceived by British travellers and residents.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

## CHAPTER 2

### JOHN BENJAMIN SEELY: ROMANTIC RUINS

Science has had her adventurers and philanthropy her achievements: the shores of Asia have been invaded by a race of students with no rapacity but for lettered relics: by naturalists, whose cruelty extends not to one human inhabitant; by philosophers, ambitious only for the extirpation of error, and the diffusion of truth. It remains for the artist to claim his part in these guiltless spoliations, and to transport to Europe the picturesque beauties of these favoured regions.

- Thomas and William Daniell, *A Picturesque Voyage to India by the Way of China* (1810)<sup>62</sup>

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the collection of Indian antiquities was less common compared to that of Egypt, Italy and Greece.<sup>63</sup> This was due to many Indian sites being supervised by Hindu priests, as well as the limited aesthetic appreciation for Indian art.<sup>64</sup> However, it was the artistic renderings of Indian monuments and antiquities in their ruined state that garnered much demand in Britain.<sup>65</sup> Depictions of Indian ruins attracted devotees of the ‘picturesque’, an aesthetic characterised by a consciously staged quality in the appreciation of irregular or arresting forms.<sup>66</sup> Derived from the Italian *pittoresco* (‘in the manner of a painter’), the picturesque transformed and ‘framed’ reality in an idealised portrayal.<sup>67</sup> In the same way Egyptian artefacts were ransacked and uprooted in the fervour of

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<sup>62</sup> Thomas and William Daniell, *A Picturesque Voyage to India by the Way of China* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1810), pp. i-ii, [my italics].

<sup>63</sup> Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing, 1770-1840*, p. 241.

<sup>64</sup> Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters*, pp. 1-48; Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*, pp. 479-480.

<sup>65</sup> Mildred Archer, *Indian Architecture and the British 1780-1830* (Feltham, Middlesex: Country Life Books, 1968), p. 33.

<sup>66</sup> Mavis Batey, ‘The Picturesque: An Overview’, in *Garden History*, 2, no. 2 (Winter, 1994), p. 122.

<sup>67</sup> Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760-1800* (Aldershot, England: Scholar Press, 1990), p.67; the aesthetic ideal of the ‘picturesque’ was popularised by

excavation, Indian ruins were interrogated and aestheticized to be transported back to the colonial *metropole*. Eastern ruins and their picturesque depictions were in this way very much part of the ‘spoliations’ of empire, the foot soldiers artists like the Daniells or William Hodges before them.<sup>68</sup>

This chapter will explore the workings of the ruin motif in early nineteenth-century colonial India through a study of John Benjamin Seely’s descriptive travelogue, *The Wonders of Elora* (1824). Seely’s work was one of the period’s primary Anglo-Indian texts to exemplify the romantic predilection for ruins as aesthetic entities above temporal, religious or archaeological concerns. However, it will be argued that the *The Wonders of Elora* was an imperialistic work which strategically employed, rather than subscribed to, the romantic world view. The discursive site of the ruin motif as transposed to an Eastern setting was used to re-orientate Britain’s national destiny towards the regions of her empire. Edward Said has implicated ‘the romantic idea of restorative reconstruction’ in Orientalist representations, the heightened role of the imagination in romantic conceptualisations robbing eastern landscapes and peoples of semantic agency.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, the ruins at Ellora, and India itself, were de-contextualised by Seely to be incorporated into both the personal and national body. The way in which this unfolded will reveal aesthetic culture to have been inextricable to the making of national and colonial identities.

### **The Cave of Wonders**

Located thirty kilometres from the city of Aurangabad in western India, Ellora was briefly the capital of the Rashtrakuta Empire which ruled large parts of the country between

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William Gilpin, who defined it as ‘a term expressive of that peculiar kind of beauty, which is agreeable in a picture’ in William Gilpin, *An Essay on Prints* (London: B. Blamire, 1792), p. viii.

<sup>68</sup> Hodges captured the Indian landscape in picturesque evocations in his illustrated travelogue, William Hodges, *Travels in India, During the Years 1780, 1781, 1782, and 1783* (London: J. Edwards, 1793); he also accompanied Captain James Cook in the South Pacific between 1772-1775 as the expedition’s artist and his sketches and paintings were used to illustrate James Cook, *A Voyage Towards the South Pole, and Round the world: Performed in His Majesty's Ships the Resolution and Adventure, in the years 1772, 1773, 1774, and 1775* (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1777).

<sup>69</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 168.

the sixth and tenth centuries.<sup>70</sup> The religious tolerance of its rulers was reflected in the construction of thirty-four Buddhist, Hindu and Jain rock-cut ‘cave’ temples in Ellora, as well as those on the nearby island of Elephanta.<sup>71</sup> Rock-cut buildings in India involved the carving of solid natural rock to replicate traditional architectural forms, such as colonnaded temples and sculptured interiors.<sup>72</sup> The earliest examples were the Barabar caves in the eastern city of Bihar, a multi-storey building carved into the side of a mountain in the second century BC.<sup>73</sup> By the time the cave temples at Ellora were constructed from the seventh century, more sophisticated techniques had been developed that allowed three-dimensional, free-standing structures. The rock-cut temples at Ellora, hewn from the vertical face of the Charanandri hills in the Deccan plateau, spanned approximately two kilometres in a north-south direction. The entire complex became one of the foremost sacred spaces in India and attracted pilgrims from many faiths.<sup>74</sup>

In 1810, Seely departed for Ellora from Bombay by way of Poona, Ahmed-Nuggur, and Toka in the west of India ‘unsupported, unaided, a dreary distance of nearly three hundred miles, at a considerable expense’.<sup>75</sup> By the time of his journey, many of the rock-cut temples in Ellora had fallen into ruin and were sparsely occupied by Hindu priests and worshippers.<sup>76</sup> The site was also relatively unknown amongst the British public. The only extensive account of its existence was an essay in the *Asiatic Researches*, the primary publication of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.<sup>77</sup> Living within the abandoned complex for fourteen days, Seely would later publish *The Wonders of Elora*, an unashamedly emotive account of these Indian ruins in a romantic textual rendering. This work would establish the

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<sup>70</sup> Walter Spink, *Ajanta to Ellora* (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1967), pp. 1-13.

<sup>71</sup> K.V. Soundara Rajan, *The Ellora Monoliths: Rashtrakuta Architecture in the Deccan* (Delhi : Gian Pub. House, 1988), pp. 11-26.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Spink, *Ajanta to Ellora*, p. 69.

<sup>75</sup> John Benjamin Seely, *The Wonders of Elora* (London: Geo. B. Whittaker, 1825), p. 217.

<sup>76</sup> Seely, *The Wonders of Elora*, p. 18.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

ruins at Ellora in the popular British imagination and warrant their inclusion in the itineraries of tourists over the next century.<sup>78</sup>

Seely's text has been dismissed by some historians as merely another picturesque travelogue at the tail-end of the Romantic period.<sup>79</sup> However, it was deeply informed by the dynamics of empire-building at the time of its composition. Prior to its publication, Seely had been firmly entrenched in the colonial apparatus as a captain in the Bombay Native Infantry and military secretary to the Vice-President of the Indian Supreme Government.<sup>80</sup> Upon returning to England in 1818 due to ill health, Seely wrote magazine articles and books in defence of Empire and its operations in British India.<sup>81</sup> While his most famous travel text was prefaced by a quotation from Mark Akenside, a poet associated with the picturesque movement, its title page also contained the dedication 'To the Right Hon. The Earl of Liverpool, K. G. Prime Minister of Great Britain, ... as a humble tribute of respect for the enlightened, liberal, and prudent measures pursued in our foregoing relations and domestic policy'<sup>82</sup> This dual dynamic of a romantic text enclosed within an overarching imperial frame is vital to a proper understanding of Seely's work.

### **An Imperial Traveller**

On one level, Seely seemed to typify the figure of the 'imperial traveller' to whom India was a *terra nullius* awaiting romantic evocation. The rise of tourism outside Europe

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<sup>78</sup> Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters*, p. 137.

<sup>79</sup> Seely's text was described as a 'caricature' of the myriad of picturesque travel accounts that preceded it in Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters*, p. 133; it has also been dismissed in Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing*, p. 241, 'Seely's 1824 *Wonders of Elora* is marked by a Belzoni-style amateurism which indulges a homespun discourse of the sublime...As his title proclaims, Seely's "wonder" knows no bounds'.

<sup>80</sup> Seely, *The Wonders of Elora*, (title page).

<sup>81</sup> See John B. Seely, *A Voice from India, in Answer to the Reformers of England* (London: G. B. Whittaker, 1824); John B. Seely, *A Few Hints to the West Indians, on their Present Claims to Exclusive Favour and Protection, at the Expense of the East India Interests with some Observations and Notes on India* (London: Kingsbury, Parbury and Allen, 1823).

<sup>82</sup> Seely, *The Wonders of Elora*, (title page).

from the late-eighteenth century coincided with and was enabled by colonial expansion.<sup>83</sup> Many historians have argued that western encounters with colonised nations involved the same power relations inherent in colonialism. Most notably, Edward Said contended that representational strategies employed by Europeans operated within a framework of Western understanding believed to be superior and normative.<sup>84</sup> Mary-Louise Pratt has specifically addressed this dynamic in the travel writing of Europeans in imperial settings. Her term ‘the monarch-of-all-I-survey’ conveys imperialistic modes of perception in which European travellers viewed colonised landscapes as domains for their inspection, control and pleasure.<sup>85</sup> This power relationship is said to have manifested in the vocabulary, imagery and structure of travel texts in a way that denied the subjectivities of the cultures and peoples described.<sup>86</sup>

The aesthetic reconfiguration of the Ellora ruins in *The Wonders of Elora* could be seen to effect a similar imperial mode of functioning. Seely writes of the arrival at the ruined complex, ‘Bruce’s emotions were not more vivid or tumultuous on first beholding the springs of the Nile, than mine were on reaching the temples of Elora’.<sup>87</sup> In conjuring James Bruce’s quest to discover the source of the Nile in 1768, Seely frames his own endeavours within the language of discovery, inspection, and visual mastery. In *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics, 1716-1818*, Elizabeth Bohl argued that ‘Aesthetics harbours a strong presumption in favour of the hierarchies that structured British society’.<sup>88</sup> In a colonial setting, ‘its exclusionary logic constructs not only “the Vulgar” and women, but also non-

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<sup>83</sup> Billie Melman, *Women’s Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 4.

<sup>84</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 3.

<sup>85</sup> Deborah Cherry, ‘Algeria In and Out of the Frame: Visuality and Cultural Tourism in the Nineteenth Century’, in David Crouch and Nina Lubben, eds., *Visual Culture and Tourism* (New York: Berg, 2003), p. 42.

<sup>86</sup> Helen Gilbert and Anna Johnston, ‘Introduction’, in Helen Gilbert and Anna Johnston, eds., *In Transit: Travel, Text, and Empire* (New York: P. Lang, 2002), p. 13.

<sup>87</sup> Seely, *The Wonders of Elora*, p. 125.

<sup>88</sup> Bohls (1995), *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics, 1716-1818*, p. 12.



Europeans, as foils against which to define the ‘Man of a Polite Imagination’.<sup>89</sup> Similarly, Seely’s aesthetic transformation of the Ellora ruins in subsequent chapters could be seen to enact colonial power relations. The exclusionary function of a romantic aesthetic imposed upon an Indian site ultimately worked to establish a new political and social hierarchy by which the region was to be governed. Critically, this transformation operated by way of the ruin motif as conceived within the romantic tradition.

### **Romantic Ruins**

The Ellora ruins were transformed into an archetypal Romantic ruin firstly through the stance adopted towards the physical and conceptual void at their centre. On one hand, the ruins embodied in Seely’s text the romantic universalist vision. Writing of the early nineteenth century, Maurizio Bossi referred to the ‘tension between a unitary vision of the universe and increasing scientific specialisation.’<sup>90</sup> Seely’s experience of the Ellora ruins displayed this romantic quest for the whole in the midst of the scientific, classificatory impulses emerging at the time. Of the grand hall of the temple of Keylas, Seely wrote, ‘it is impossible, in describing the *intricate measurements* of these singular and numerous excavations, to avoid occasionally diverging right or left to some object *that has a relation to the part upon which* we have fixed our attention.’<sup>91</sup> Attempts to anatomise the temple, through the quantification of its parts, were here thwarted by the irrepressible magnetism of the whole. However, it was through concurrently being fragmented entities that the Ellora cave temples fully assumed a romantic aspect. Despite the powerful unity of the ruins, it was the conceptual void at their centre that is for Seely their primary import. These ‘forms of

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Maurizio Bossi, ‘Preface’, in Stefano Poggi and Maurizio Bossi, eds., *Romanticism in Science: Science in Europe, 1790-1840* (Boston: Kluwer Academic, 1994), p. ix.

<sup>91</sup> Seely, *The Wonders of Elora*, p.141.

architecture...of which we have no example among the ancient orders'<sup>92</sup> conjured a gulf in the European cultural consciousness that he terms 'the Great Unknown'.<sup>93</sup> On one level, this referred to the epistemic gulf in which 'There is not one person in twenty that ever knew there was such a place as Elora.'<sup>94</sup> The Ellora ruins displayed the incompleteness, the 'diasparactive triad' discussed by McFarland, at the heart of the romantic consciousness through not only being unknown but inherently unknowable. They continually resisted human comprehension, 'the mind is so wrapt up in wonder...that it is not in a fit state to receive impressions,'<sup>95</sup> as well as language itself, eliciting 'thoughts and reflections ...that the human language is incapable of giving utterance to.'<sup>96</sup> The experience of the ruins was also one of sensory and cognitive fragmentation, 'On a close approach to the temples, the eye and imagination are bewildered... The feelings are ...of awe, wonder, and delight, that at first is painful, and it is a long time before they become sufficiently sobered...'<sup>97</sup> However, the sense of incompleteness and fragmentation at the centre of these ruins was not antithetical to the romantic vision of unity. In support of his observations, Seely inserted an extract from the twenty-page quarto by Lieutenant-Colonel Fitzclarence, a contemporary who also briefly visited the Keylas temple:

My eyes and mind are absolutely *satiated* with the wonders I have seen: the first are weary with objects so gigantic and extraordinary, *to which they were totally unaccustomed*, and the latter has been so much on the stretch, being *crowded and overwhelmed* with ideas so overpowering and various, that I despair of ever forming any calm judgement upon them.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Seely, *The Wonders of Elora*, p. 172.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

Here, the state of fullness, of being ‘satiated’, not only co-existed with but derived from what was inherently unknown, incomplete and fragmented. Simultaneously, the Ellora ruins symbolised the romantic vision of unity and the fragmented reality that drove the quest to achieve it.

The Ellora ruins were further manipulated according to the romantic ruin motif through being aesthetic entities above historical, cultural and religious significations. On the outset of his journey, Seely quoted from the Edinburgh Review, ‘[excavations] are undertaken to display power and to embody feeling, *without being subservient to any purpose of utility.*’<sup>99</sup> Accordingly, Seely’s subject matter was divorced from its lived reality and reconfigured as a mystical, imagined site, ‘a land of enchantment, ... among works that were not the offspring of human hands.’<sup>100</sup> Seely derided any practical realities associated with the Ellora ruins which detracted from their idealised position as imagined entities, ‘To show the degeneracy of the present race of Hindoos ... in this fine and wonderful temple, suspended from the pillars right across, were wet clothes hanging up to dry!’<sup>101</sup> Equally reviled were the religious and living rituals of ‘The degraded priests of the present day ... With their usual indifference and apathy, they now make fires in the temple to cook their victuals with’.<sup>102</sup> The cultural and historical contexts of the ruins were also removed through the constant dismissal of their relevance to the purposes of his text. Upon encountering sculptures or engravings of Hindoo mythological figures, Seely wrote, ‘it is an interminable subject, and one of those that, after the deepest research and closest investigation, produces neither amusement nor information’.<sup>103</sup>

Lastly, the Ellora ruins are constructed as romantic structures through being seen as natural rather than man-made formations. In beholding the ruins, Seely wrote, ‘I sought in

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. xi.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 456.

vain for any incident in the lapse of time which could convey an equal conception of the power of man over matter.’<sup>104</sup> Instead, they were primarily constructed from the hands of nature, ‘Scooped and scraped out of the parent rock, ... seeming as if “The womb of earth/Shrunk whence such mighty quarries thence had birth.”’<sup>105</sup> The Ellora ruins as romantic entities were most dramatically fused with nature by way of the Sublime, ‘How sublimely awful must nature here appear ... reverberating through the areas and excavations of the mountain, shaking these massy tenements to their foundations!’<sup>106</sup> This synthesis allowed Seely to traverse his exterior and inner worlds, ‘Everything here invites the mind to contemplation,’<sup>107</sup> ‘Nothing can be better adapted to estrange the soul from all mundane ideas.’<sup>108</sup> Ultimately, the author’s quest for romantic synthesis between self and nature was found in the Ellora ruins as a formation removed from the realm of man.

### **Colonial Dislocations**

However, the romantic transformation of the Ellora ruins was also enacted as a response to the instability of the colonial experience that was the reverse side of triumphalist discourse. This alternative narrative spoke from within the midst of empire. Such a perspective ultimately offered an insight into empire as a process, not eventuality.

On the face of it, India seemed to be very much entrenched in the British political and cultural consciousness by the early nineteenth century. The victory of British forces in the Battle of Plassey in 1757 had established the model for British colonial success in India, namely the mixture of military conquest and the infiltration of local forms of government.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 231.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p.160.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p.125.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p.159.

<sup>109</sup> Richard Allen, ‘First Encounters: Works by Sir William Jones and others,’ in Richard Allen and Harish Trivedi, eds., *Literature & Nation: Britain and India, 1800-1990* (London ; New York : Routledge in association with the Open University, 2000), p. 29.

This process was complete by 1818, less than a decade before the publication of Seely's text, when the Maratha princes surrendered to the East India Company and British sovereignty was established over most of India.<sup>110</sup> The growth of British power was accompanied by the flowering of scholarship on Indian religion, mythology and iconography.<sup>111</sup> The establishment of the Asiatic Society in 1784, under the patronage of Governor of Bengal Warren Hastings, institutionalised this new Orientalism under the auspices of the colonial apparatus.<sup>112</sup> The Society's output included translations of Hindu epics such as the *Bhagavad-Gita* and *Sakuntala*, which fuelled interest in Oriental scholarship throughout the European continent.<sup>113</sup> At the same time, visual information about India reached the British public on a widespread scale with the publication of William Hodges' *Select Views of India, 1785-88* which contained forty-eight aquatints.<sup>114</sup> According to Patrick Conner, Hodges' works 'Presented Indian architecture to British eyes for first time as something aesthetically admirable.'<sup>115</sup> Hodges' *Travels in India*, written a decade later, featured an architectural treatise which challenged the view that the classical style was the sole benchmark of artistic excellence.<sup>116</sup> In an address to his compatriots in Bengal, orientalist Sir William Jones declared that Indian artistic forms would 'furnish our own architects with new ideas of beauty and sublimity.'<sup>117</sup> Domestically, the influence of the East manifested in Indian motifs used in British architecture and design.<sup>118</sup> The most spectacular of these was the temple in Melchet Park erected by retired army officer Sir John Osbourne in 1800 as a tribute to Hastings.<sup>119</sup> Echoing the earlier sentiments of Jones, Osbourne wrote, 'I was pleased a having discovered

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Patrick Conner, *Oriental Architecture in the West* (London : Thames and Hudson, c1979), p. 114.

<sup>112</sup> Fulford, Debbie Lee and Peter J. Kitson., eds., *Literature, Science and Exploration in the Romantic Era: Bodies of Knowledge* (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 79.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Archer, *Indian Architecture and the British 1780-1830*, p. 4.

<sup>115</sup> Conner, *Oriental Architecture in the West*, p. 114.

<sup>116</sup> Hodges, *Travels in India*, pp. 63-77.

<sup>117</sup> Conner, *Oriental Architecture in the West*, p. 114.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

new sources of beauty and variety...'<sup>120</sup> The artistic works of Thomas and William Daniells, undertaken during a tour of India in 1786-93, were also featured in the libraries and drawing-rooms of the elite classes.<sup>121</sup> These literary, artistic and architectural developments seemed to signal a cultural shift in the admiration for traditions other than the classical. Moreover, they also suggested the influence of India on British culture that, while having roots in ancient times, was now coming into fruition.

However, Seely's text pointed to the very precarious position India still held in the British national and cultural psyche. Of India, Seely lamented the fact that 'four-fifths of the people of Great Britain know little or nothing about that country, not even so much as they do of South America, with which we are neither socially nor morally connected.'<sup>122</sup> For most of the British public, India was still shrouded in mystery and darkness, a land of the 'great Unknown.' The exaltation of Indian culture and literature by a small group of intellectuals was often not shared by the general public and politicians.<sup>123</sup> Although the place of origin for Schwab's 'Oriental Renaissance', 'Great Britain could not be the heart of such a renaissance' and by the time of Seely's text, the bulk of scholarship came out of France and Germany.<sup>124</sup> According to Patrick Conner, even at the height of the popularity of oriental architecture, 'it must have required a considerable measure of self-confidence, or disregard for conservative opinion, to erect a Chinese kiosk in one's garden.'<sup>125</sup> Similarly, the adoption of Indian styles was often 'prompted either by some strong aesthetic preference or by a specific connection with the Far East.'<sup>126</sup> By the time of the publication of Seely's text, the enthusiasm for Indian

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<sup>120</sup> Archer, *Indian Architecture and the British 1780-1830*, p. 4.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., pp. 24-25.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>122</sup> Seely, *The Wonders of Elora*, p. 228.

<sup>123</sup> J.J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: the Encounter between Asian and Western Thought* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 17.

<sup>124</sup> Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880* trans. Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 43.

<sup>125</sup> Conner, *Oriental Architecture in the West*, p. 6.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

culture cultivated by the eighteenth-century orientalists had waned even further with the growth of anti-Indian sentiment.<sup>127</sup> In particular, the 1817 publication of James Mill's *History of British India*, a highly critical account of Indian religion and culture, paved the way for the overtly racist attitudes of the late-nineteenth century.<sup>128</sup> Evangelical groups operating in India also stressed the idolatry and backwardness of the Hindu religion.<sup>129</sup>

### Colonial Artefacts

Seely's response to dislocations in the British colonial experience was the attempt to assimilate the colonial into the national body. Dana Arnold has argued that 'the relation between the centre to periphery is germane to the construction of colonial identities.'<sup>130</sup> Seely also was aware that the success of the colonial enterprise was dependent on how successfully colonial and domestic identities could be reconciled. 'I fear,' wrote Seely, 'without extensive, accurate, and continued inquiries by competent persons on the spot, *darkness*, with regard to a good knowledge of India, will be of long continuance...'<sup>131</sup>

In pursuit of this goal, Seely's fashioning of the Ellora ruins as Romantic entities sought to incorporate them, and India itself, into the British national body. Seely's transformation of the Ellora ruins into Romantic entities could be seen to effect the assimilative mechanism discussed by Stephen Greenblatt which 'work(s) like enzymes to change the ideological composition of foreign bodies.'<sup>132</sup> In *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*, Greenblatt argued that Europeans employed representational strategies to contain the shock and unease elicited by foreign cultures, specifically through

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Dana Arnold, ed., *Cultural Identities and the Aesthetics of Britishness* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), p. 37.

<sup>131</sup> Seely, *The Wonders of Elora*, p. 228.

<sup>132</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: the Wonder of the New World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 4.

the transformation of the unfamiliar into the familiar.<sup>133</sup> Similarly, Nigel Leask referred to the ‘therapeutical or assimilative agencies [that] struggle to restore homeostasis, the healthful ease of the Same’<sup>134</sup>. In the context of India, he argued that orientalist designs and narratives were refashioned in a way that was palatable to the European sensibility.<sup>135</sup> However, these authors were essentially dealing with the self-protective mechanisms of the first encounter, the semantic neutralisation of foreign cultures as a resistive strategy. In contrast, Seely willingly sought to incorporate the foreign body, albeit reconfigured, into the national one as a solution to the challenges posed by colonisation.

This very different objective could be seen in the choice of the Ellora ruins as the site upon which to colonial identity was to be performed. Specifically, the task of their preservation was conceived by Seely as a kind of re-enactment of colonialism itself. After setting up the Ellora ruins as a romantic site, Seely implores to the reader, ‘What service in the preservation of these temples would the employment of a body of thirty-five pioneers effect ... in preserving from decay these unrivalled excavations! ... We have skilful officers ... and eminent young engineer officers’.<sup>136</sup> The initial steps made in preserving the integrity of the Ellora ruins were here conceived as a first frontier in the advancement of the colonial project. Thereafter, the site offered the chance to demonstrate the technological and moral proficiency of Britain as a ruling power. ‘A powerful, scientific, and generous nation, like the English, ought not to allow any injury to happen to these mighty works’.<sup>137</sup> The superiority of British colonisation compared to previous rulers was also able to be enacted upon the site, ‘The Mahomedans and Portuguese are charged with having, from religious fanaticism, done their best to destroy these temples by powder. If we silently allow local causes to injure them,

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<sup>133</sup> Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*.

<sup>134</sup> Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp 7-8.

<sup>135</sup> Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East*.

<sup>136</sup> Seely, *The Wonders of Elora*, p. 201.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*



... we are not a jot better than these barbarians.’<sup>138</sup> In the final step towards figurative possession, Britain was established as the guardians of these Indian ruins, ‘while we esteem and admire these venerable and singular works, it becomes us imperatively to preserve them’.<sup>139</sup>

In this respect, Seely’s imposition the ruin motif was an opportunistic one. Rather than strictly adhering to the romantic tradition regarding ruins, Seely used aesthetic culture to forge a niche for Empire. The next chapter will explore the semantic manipulation of the ruin motif that, while producing a different aesthetic, was essentially forged within the same framework as part of the imperial endeavour.

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<sup>138</sup> Seely, *The Wonders of Elora*, p. 202.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER 3

### JAMES FERGUSSON: RUINS CLASSIFIED

It is only within the limits of the present century that Geology was rescued from the *dreams of cataclysms and convulsions* which formed the staple of the science in the last century; ...All that *picturesque wildness* with which the materials seemed at first sight to be distributed over the world's surface has been reduced to order.<sup>140</sup>

This juxtaposition, almost collision, of two very different aesthetic and intellectual traditions appeared in the first volume of James Fergusson's architectural tract, *A History of Architecture in all Countries* (1874). In it Fergusson conceived the study of ruins as the means by which to display the scientific prowess of his age. The objective study of ruins, when they were 'read - when all the phenomena are gathered together and classified', would yield the 'beautiful simplicity of law'.<sup>141</sup> This scientific method was framed as the antidote to the 'cataclysms and convulsions' of romanticism that had ruptured the scientific terrain between the Enlightenment and his own time. Such a textual configuration recalled Auguste Comte, the founder of Positivism, who wrote in 1848, 'the regeneration of order...is so deeply compromised by the anarchy of the present time.'<sup>142</sup> In part an attempt to revive the intellectual traditions of the Enlightenment, Positivism advocated objectivity and the scientific method as the best means of acquiring knowledge.<sup>143</sup> By embedding such a meditation in his volume, Fergusson reiterated the role of ruins as the site upon which contested cultural, intellectual and political ideas were displayed.

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<sup>140</sup> James Fergusson, *A History of Architecture in all Countries, from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, volume 1, second edition, (London: John Murray, 1874), p. 52, [my italics].

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Auguste Comte, trans. J. H. Bridges, *A General View of Positivism* (New York, R. Speller, 1957), p. 22.

<sup>143</sup> Comte, *A General View of Positivism*.

However, Fergusson's seminal work about the world's architectural traditions was the culmination of decades of travel in India. It was the first-hand encounters with the East and its ruins that provided the cornerstone of Fergusson's entire architectural and intellectual world view. Operating amidst the traditions of picturesque and romantic travel, his work would advance the shift from aesthetic to scientific study of India's ancient built remains. A *History of Architecture in All Countries*, one of the most influential architectural works of the nineteenth century, was essentially the application of a conceptual framework conceived from the study of Indian ruins.

This chapter will explore the operation of the ruin motif in late-nineteenth century colonial India through a study of the work of James Fergusson. Fergusson's writings have been approached as illustrations of the broader cultural shift towards the scientific paradigm from the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>144</sup> The study of architecture has been seen as the means by which Fergusson displayed the scientific planks of objectivity, accuracy and order. However, Fergusson's subject matters were also essentially *ruins*, aesthetic entities encumbered with all the cultural significations of previous generations. It will be argued that the intellectual shift Fergusson wished to advocate firstly necessitated the dismantling of the ruin motif, an inheritance from the romantic period, in order to fashion ruins as material, archaeological objects. As structures critical to Fergusson's entire conceptual framework, Indian ruins played a central role in this semantic manipulation. Fergusson's reconfiguration of the ruin motif in colonial India ultimately revealed the imperial milieu of the late-nineteenth century.

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<sup>144</sup> See Tapati Guha-Thakurta, 'The Compulsions of visual Representation in Colonial India', in Maria Antonella Pelizzari, ed., *Traces of India: Photography, Architecture, and the Politics of Representation, 1850-1900*;

(Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2003), pp. 108-139; Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1977).

## Beginnings

In 1835, the young Scotsman abandoned work as an indigo planter to embark on his first architectural tour of the Indian sub-continent. Of this period, Fergusson would later write, ‘few men have, either from education or the professional pursuits of their life, been less prepared for such a work as this. From boyhood I was destined to the desk’.<sup>145</sup> The son of a military surgeon, James Fergusson attended secondary school in Edinburgh and England before leaving for India to partner at the mercantile firm Fairlie, Fergusson & Co. Over the next decade, he ran a successful indigo factory and acquired a small fortune that funded his retirement from business. This allowed Fergusson to commence his activities exploring India ‘chiefly on a camel’s back, from end to end and from side to side’. Armed with a diary, a draftsman’s pad, and a camera lucida, Fergusson conducted an exhaustive survey of Indian ruins that would provide material for his later tracts on Eastern architecture.<sup>146</sup> His emphasis on objectivity and ‘correctness’ of representation in the survey of Indian architecture would pioneer the scholarly treatment of its remains. Consequently, Fergusson’s work has most often been associated with the intellectual and cultural trends of the late-nineteenth century and the revived scientific fervour.

The period from the mid-nineteenth century witnessed a shift from an intuitive, sensory mode of interaction with ruins to one defined by physicality, exactitude and quantitative appraisal. In 1794, British landscape artist William Hodges expressed disapproval at the dispassionate attitude of long-term residents in India who ‘lose the idea of the first impression ... the novelty is soon effaced ... reasoning assumes the place of observation, and the traveller is lost to the philosopher’.<sup>147</sup> However, it was these very qualities which would be valued over the next century as passions gave way to rationality and

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<sup>145</sup> James Fergusson, *An Historical Inquiry into the True Principles of Beauty in Art*, (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1849), p. xi.

<sup>146</sup> Guha-Thakurta, ‘The Compulsions of visual Representation in Colonial India’, pp. 112-113.

<sup>147</sup> William Hodges, *Travels in India, During the Years 1780, 1781, 1782, and 1783*, 2nd Edition (London : Printed for the author, and sold by J. Edwards, 1794), p. iv.

curiosity to the mania for classification. Sensory and emotive impressions were secondary to historical and geometric accuracy. The consolidation of this approach in mainstream culture could be seen in Thomas Wallace Knox's popular children's book, *The Boy Travellers in the Far East* (1881). Essentially a travel account in the guise of a fictional adventure narrative, this work was replete with to-scale diagrams and intricate descriptions of the size, layout and material of various ruins in Southeast Asia. In contrast to the impressionistic descriptions of the last century, many ruins were now reduced to a mathematical configuration, 'If you want to find the ruins on the map, you must look in about latitude 13° 30' north, and longitude 104° east.'<sup>148</sup>

### **The Indian Picturesque**

It was within the tradition of the late-nineteenth century that Fergusson and his works have most often been studied. However, the period in which Fergusson commenced his surveys was governed by Romantic conventions of observation. The landscapes and ruins with which he came into contact were almost exclusively inscribed with picturesque renderings, most notably by artists such as the Daniells and William Hodges. The multitude of Indian travel accounts and journals published in the early nineteenth century were also self-declared picturesque narratives. Following this textual and intellectual lineage, one of Fergusson's first works was *Picturesque Illustrations of Ancient Architecture in Hindoostan* (1847), its twenty-four lithographs the product from the notes and sketches from his first tour across India.<sup>149</sup> According to Tapati Guha-Thakurta, 'the "picturesque" still constituted the only available frame of representation, the medium through which his travels and observations could translate into a larger historical project.'<sup>150</sup> In 1866, Fergusson spoke of this period in an address to the Society of Arts, 'No attempt had been made to classify them

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<sup>148</sup> Thomas W. Knox, *The Boy Travellers in the Far East: Part Second, Adventures of Two Youths in a Journey to Siam and Java, with Descriptions of Cochin-China, Cambodia, Sumatra and the Malay Archipelago* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1881), p. 48.

<sup>149</sup> James Fergusson, *Picturesque Illustrations of Ancient Architecture in Hindostan* (London: J. Hogarth, 1848).

<sup>150</sup> Guha-Thakurta, 'The Compulsions of visual Representation in Colonial India', p. 116.

[India's architecture] and the vaguest possible ideas prevailed as to their age or relative antiquity.' Indeed, as put by Pramod Chandra, Fergusson's early activities in India were conducted as a 'veritable one-man architectural survey'.<sup>151</sup> Upon returning to England in 1843, Fergusson found a public 'not then prepared for such works'.

### **Classical Ruins**

Initially operating within such a historical and cultural context, Fergusson's forging of a new paradigm firstly necessitated the dismantling of the old. This was critically achieved through the reconfiguration of the ruin motif according to the classical tradition that underpinned the scientific revival. By the late-nineteenth century, the ruins of Rome and Greece had been exhaustively studied, measured and catalogued. The ruins of India, also the products of highly advanced civilisations, were the new frontier for the revived scientific fervour. As the culmination of Fergusson's scientific and intellectual endeavours, *A History of Architecture in all Countries* (1874) was the primary text through which this process could be discerned.

In this text, Indian ruins were conceived according to the classical tradition firstly through ideas surrounding fragmentation. In contrast to the romantic aesthetic, the loss and absence within the fabric of ruins were seen as something regrettable. Of the cave temples at Karli, a first century BC Buddhist temple complex in western India, Fergusson wrote, 'the absence of the wooden ornaments of the external porch, as well as our ignorance of the mode in which this temple was finished laterally, ... prevents us from judging of the effect of the front in its perfect state.'<sup>152</sup> The semantic and structural void at the centre of these ruins was here seen as a hindrance to their full appreciation. Consequently, Fergusson sought to repair in these gaps through scientific archaeological elucidation, 'The main outlines are clear, the

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<sup>151</sup> Pramod Chandra, *On the Study of Indian Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 13.

<sup>152</sup> Fergusson, *A History of Architecture in all Countries*, p. 448.

details require filling in'.<sup>153</sup> The scientific disciplines of ethnology, geology, and archaeology were seen as the means by which the original semantic unity of ruins could be restored, 'Step by step, by slow degrees, rocks have been classified and phenomena explained.'<sup>154</sup>

Meditating on the value of ancient Indian structures overall, Fergusson concluded, 'they ... fill up a great gap in our knowledge of the subject, which without them would remain a void.'<sup>155</sup> This idea saw Indian ruins ultimately conceived as both unified and unifier in the classical consciousness. In this way, the sense of loss elicited by ruins invited narrative and archaeological reconstruction, Fergusson desiring to 'unravel the mysteries of the long-forgotten past.'<sup>156</sup>

The classical tradition was further established by Fergusson through the textual transformation of Indian ruins from aesthetic entities to material sites. Firstly, the introspective, metaphorical language of previous visitors to the site was replaced by that of exactitude and physicality in Fergusson's exhaustive descriptions of the measurements, style and material of each structure featured. Aesthetic judgements about India's architectural and cultural heritage were also performed empirically, 'Each building, as we ascend the stream of time, is more perfect than the one that followed, so that, ... it is a sufficient test of the relative age of two buildings to say that the one is more perfect than the other.'<sup>157</sup> Previously subjective attributes were here rendered quantifiable in the same way two points can be measured in space.

Most revealing was Fergusson's treatment of the cave temples of Ellora, much exalted half a century earlier by John Seely in *The Wonders of Elora*. No longer an unknown enclave off the coast of India, these ruins were now 'better known than almost any other structure in

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., p 53

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid. p. 97.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p. 547.

that country, from the numerous views and sketches of it that have been published.’<sup>158</sup> Such a style of interaction essentially rendered this site an aesthetic entity in the eyes of British visitors. However, it was precisely this sensory and imaginative mode of operation which was problematic in approaching these ruins and lent to ‘considerable misconceptions’.<sup>159</sup> Argued Fergusson, ‘Almost everyone who sees these temples is struck with the apparent prodigious amount of labour bestowed on their excavation .... there is no doubt that their monolithic character is the principal source of awe and wonder’.<sup>160</sup> This pointed to the aesthetic inheritance of previous decades in which ‘the impression,’ a mode of perception governed by instantaneous, unchecked sensory information, reigned supreme. Fergusson attempted to provide a corrective to this tradition through scientific elucidation, ‘In reality, however, it is considerably easier and less expensive to excavate a temple than to build one.’ The mystique surrounding the temples as superhuman endeavours fashioned through a natural formation was dispelled by their physical and financial mechanics, ‘the question is simply this - whether it is easier to chip away 50,000 yards of rock,...or to quarry 50,000 cubic yards of stone,...the excavation process would probably cost about one-tenth of the other.’<sup>161</sup> Similarly demystified and ‘de-aestheticised’ was the ruined site south of Madras known as Mahavellipore. Popularised in ‘The Curse of Kehama’ (1810) by Robert Southey, one of the ‘Lake Poets’ of the Romantic school, it was one of the main examples Eastern ruins aestheticized in the British imagination. In the hands of Fergusson, the literary and metaphorical renderings of the site were replaced by the language of exactitude in the descriptions of the physical dimensions of its geological strata.<sup>162</sup> Ultimately, the vital materiality of ruins was restored by way of the classical ruin motif.

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p. 578.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 581.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 582.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 502.



### A Colonial Ethnography

The conceptualisation of Indian ruins in the classical tradition of the ruin motif ultimately worked to establish a colonial ethnography. *A History of Architecture in All Countries* was pivoted upon the central thesis of cultural decline, or the ‘inverted evolution’ of Indian culture. This referred to the idea that Indian civilisation peaked at its original conception, namely the Buddhist period around 250 BC, and subsequently degenerated until the modern period. Such a chronology was extrapolated from the study of India’s ruins, ‘A race may be obliterated, ... but it has left its traces, either as fossil remains in the shape of buildings or works.’<sup>163</sup> The progressive cultural decline in Indian history, as proposed by Fergusson, ostensibly appeared to be a purely temporal function. However, closer inspection reveals an ideological arrangement which found expression through the ruin motif.

The seeds of Fergusson’s theoretical framework could be found as early as *Picturesque Illustrations of Ancient Architecture in Hindostan*. The order of presentation of this work’s twenty-four plates not only traced Fergusson’s itinerary around India, but also the ‘inverted evolution’ of Indian civilisation. The tour commenced with Buddhist structures of northern India, argued to be the oldest examples of antiquity as well as the high-point in India’s architectural and cultural evolution. Successive structures were presented chronologically in terms of their age, from the Jain structures of the medieval period to the more recent Hindu structures of southern India which were ‘infinitely more imperfect than those of their northern neighbours.’ This timeline of cultural decline was systematised in *The History of Architecture in All Countries* which catalogued the built structures of the world by not only country, religion, and race, but also civilizational attainment. Of the Indian sub-

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

continent, Fergusson made explicit the premise of his earlier works, 'It is a history written in decay.'<sup>164</sup>

However, India's posited cultural decline was essentially from that of the classical ideal as formulated through the ruin motif. This primarily manifested in the admiration for Buddhist structures above Hindu ones, their harmony and simplicity of form representing for Fergusson the classical world view. Buddhist structures were regarded by Fergusson as the first example of architecture on the Indian sub-continent, 'we not only know from history that they are the oldest, but they bear on their face the proofs of their *primogeniture*.'<sup>165</sup> However, they were classical prototypes not because they were the first, but the most perfect in conception, 'every form and every detail is so essentially wooden that we feel in examining them that we are assisting at the birth of a new style'.<sup>166</sup> Although there were previous forms of built structures in India, 'Buddhism... was a refinement' and its remains represented the epitome of architectural and civilizational attainment in India.<sup>167</sup> Furthermore, Buddhist structures was argued to have developed along a trajectory 'till we lose sight of the style in the mist of the early ages, just when we feel we are on the point of grasping something so perfect that it may stand in comparison with the proudest monuments of European art'.<sup>168</sup> This description suggested that the value of Buddhist structures essentially lay in the closeness with which they approximated the classical European ideal. The Buddhist tradition was further comparable with the classical perfection of Graeco-Roman remains through similarities in historical circumstance. 'Owing to the fact of the Buddhists having been so long ago expelled from the country where their religion first assumed a consistent shape,' wrote Fergusson, 'their architecture has become a dead one in India, as much as the

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p. 547.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., p. 450.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p. 588.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 599.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 547.

old Grecian art is in the Greece of modern times'.<sup>169</sup> As such, Buddhist ruins were accorded the status of classical antiquity and cultural authority this entailed.

On the other hand, Hindu ruins were less valued by Fergusson through their failure to align closely enough to the classical ruin motif. Hinduism itself was seen to fall short of the classical ideal through the discourse of purity employed by Fergusson. 'The worship had degenerated considerably from its original purity', wrote the author, such that 'the ancient Aryans never erected a single building in India when they were pure'.<sup>170</sup> This corrupted religion and genealogy was manifested in the built structures of Hindus. The Hindu architectural tradition was also conceived as a decline from the classical ideals of purity and perfection, 'each succeeding century brought increasing feebleness in design, less purity in detail, and sometimes also inappropriateness of form.'<sup>171</sup> Compared to the primacy of form and balance, the 'much more ... rational design' of older Buddhist structures, the Hindu was preoccupied with detail and 'has to make his building ornamental'.<sup>172</sup> Lastly, the Hindu architectural tradition was considered as 'still a living art'.<sup>173</sup> As a living cultural and architectural tradition, Hinduism was denied the authority of antiquity accorded to classical and Buddhist structures.

The dichotomising of Buddhist and Hindu traditions around the classical ruin motif was part of a larger imperial discourse. The elevation of an extinct Buddhism in late-nineteenth century India was used as a foil against the modern inhabitants of India. While Buddhism was associated with the classical values of rationality, intellect and purity of lineage, Hinduism was accused of irrationality and superstition. In 1896, architectural theorist Banister Fletcher wrote of Hindu ruins, 'The grandeur of their imposing mass produces an impression of majestic beauty, but the effect depends almost wholly on elaboration of surface ornament,

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 546.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p. 547.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., p. 453.

rather than on abstract beauty of form, in strong contrast to Greek architecture.’<sup>174</sup> This comment captured a recurring theme in works at that time which aligned elaborate Hindu structures with the imagination and Buddhist ones with the seriousness of rationality, intellect, and pure form.

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<sup>174</sup> Banister Fletcher, *A History of Architecture: On the Comparative Method, for students, Craftsmen and Amateurs* (London : University of London, Athlone Press, 1961; first edition printed 1896), p. 893.

## **Conclusion**

The ruined form as a discursive space has provoked a rich legacy of interpretation, meditation and study since the fifteenth century. The classical forms of ancient Greek and Roman structures have especially been subject to exhaustive analysis as site, form, function and symbol in both the classical and romantic traditions. This thesis has addressed a gap in the scholarly treatment of this subject, namely the operation of the ruin motif outside of the European context. In doing so, it has contributed to existing historical understandings by suggesting alternative mechanisms by which processes occurred. Specifically, the vital role of aesthetic culture, by way of the ruin motif, in the creation and negotiation of colonial discourses has been established.

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