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9. Colonial Histories and Native Informants: Biography of an Archive¹

I

Real history and chronology have hitherto been desiderata in the literature of India, and from the genius of the people and their past government, as well as the little success of the inquiries hitherto made by Europeans, there has been a disposition to believe that the Hindus possess few authentic records. Lieut.-Colonel Mackenzie has certainly taken the most effectual way, though one of excessive labour, to explore any evidences which may yet exist of remote eras and events.

Board of Control, East India Company, February 9, 1810

Anwar Abdel Malek was perhaps the first to notice that orientalism appropriated history from the Oriental in two related senses. Orientalism took history away by claiming the exclusive authority of history in making its claims; and orientalism denied history to the Oriental by asserting the essential—both metahistorical and nonhistorical—character of the Orient and its people. As Malek wrote in 1963, “According to the traditional orientalists, an essence should exist—sometimes even clearly described in metaphysical terms—which constitutes the inalienable and common basis of all the beings considered; this essence is both ‘historical,’ since it goes back to the dawn of history, and fundamentally a-historical, since it transfixes the being, ‘the object’ of study, within its inalienable and non-evolutive specificity, instead of defining it as all other beings, states, nations, peoples, and cultures—as a product, a resultant of the vention of the forces operating in the field of historical evolution.” More recently, Edward Said has developed and extended this argument, demonstrating the myriad ways in which orientalism has constituted peoples and territories as ontological essences rather than historical entities.²

Said has argued that orientalism itself deploys a kind of “mythic dis-

course" that "conceals its own origins as well as those of what it describes." In this discourse, "Arabs [as the most salient example of Said's book] are presented in the imagery of static, almost ideal types, and neither as creatures with a potential in the process of being realized nor as history being made."³ But in the denial of history to the Oriental, history becomes lost altogether. Said insists on reading the history back in, seeing the origins of orientalist discourse in colonial histories, predicated on a past of conquest and rule. The pasts of the colonized, he writes, were erased as soon as conquest made possible the production of new forms of knowledge that endowed colonialism with natural legitimacy.

Nevertheless, Said no sooner makes this point than he proceeds to read texts of high imperialism that were written after these histories of conquest and assume, with few signs of struggle, the absence of history for the colonized subject. In this essay I seek to examine competing histories, and historicities, before colonized histories were ensnared and silenced. I will attempt to read the ambivalences and contests within early colonial historicities, imagined when colonial historiographies were still dependent on native informants and colonial histories were still unsecured by the political triumphs that made possible the "illusion of permanence." Although the colonial project of erasing colonized histories was itself fundamental to full colonial rule, this project did not succeed, as John Seeley argued for the actual British conquest of India, "in a fit of absentmindedness." Erasures were written over histories that were being actively recovered and rewritten at the same time they were being transformed into histories of loss and subordination. Mythical discourses were constructed out of historical encounters.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a great number of British writers—among them Dow, Elphinstone, Wilks, Malcolm, and Mackenzie—felt compelled to write about pre-British Indian history. These writers often engaged in more scholarly fashion a growing body of assertion and argumentation about the fundamental nature of Indian society and its civil and political institutions, in the context of extensive debates about the colonial project of conquering and ruling India. Whether in discussions about the permanent settlement in Bengal or modes of revenue settlement with peasants or village communities elsewhere in India, about the aftermath of the impeachment of Warren Hastings and the Pitt Act, or about the development of policies concerning military conquest, degrees of social and religious intervention, or the fundamental institutions of East India Company governance, historical questions were pre-

eminent. Although most British commentators saw the eighteenth century as a decadent prelude to and justification for British rule, and although they frequently disparaged Indian historical sensibilities and traditions, they nevertheless felt the need to understand India historically.

The early period of colonial rule is of course better known for the textually and philologically trained "orientalists" than for the "historians," although there was in fact a great deal of complementation in the work of the two groups. Most writers on Indian history borrowed from the work of the orientalists when speculating about ancient (pre-Muslim) India or generalizing about the character of Indian society. Alexander Dow studied Persian while an officer in the East India Company's army and published a translation of a standard Persian history in 1768. In his introduction to the translation, he wrote about subjects such as the nature of Mughal government and the effects of British rule, and only wrote seven pages on Hindu customs and manners. Though not a Sanskritist, he relied on the tutelage of a Brahman pundit in Banaras, and adopted a textual and Brahmanic view of Indian society. Many years later, the administrator and historian Monstuart Elphinstone wrote his two-volume work on Indian history with extensive borrowings from the work of orientalists, particularly in his sections on society and ancient history. But Elphinstone based the authority of his scholarship on his own extensive perusal of historical documents, as well as—in marked and explicit contradistinction to Mill—on his own personal experience of being in India.⁴ Elphinstone was clearly convinced that India could not be understood merely through its texts and grammars.

Many of the historical documents used by Elphinstone in his attempt to reconstruct the political history of the Deccan had been collected by Colin Mackenzie.⁵ Mackenzie, who spent most of his long career in peninsular India as cartographer and surveyor, had spent much of his time and resources collecting every historical record and artifact he could find. By the time of his death in 1821, Mackenzie had amassed a collection that still contains the largest set of sources for the study of the early modern historical anthropology of southern India. Mackenzie's collection also represents colonial Britain's most extensive engagement with Indian history and Indian historicity. Specifically not an orientalist—Mackenzie never learned an Indian language—Mackenzie was perhaps more serious than any other official East India Company servant in his attempts to assemble a thick historical archive for peninsular India. In these attempts, Mackenzie not only relied almost exclusively on Indian assistants and informants,

but he understood that the project of writing Indian history could be detached neither from the Indians who produced it nor from the politics of Britain's involvement in the establishment of colonial rule in India. This is not to say that Mackenzie did not share early colonial interests, for however idiosyncratic he was he was also deeply involved in the early project of conquest and rule. Nevertheless, Mackenzie's collection soon fell into a growing fault line between official orientalism and colonial sociology; on the one hand Mackenzie's textual materials did not meet orientalist standards for classicism and antiquity; on the other hand Mackenzie's histories seemed too peculiar, too sullied by myth and fancy, and too localist and Oriental to be of any real help in the development of administrative policy. Mackenzie's life and collection can thus be read to reveal the ambivalences in the historical encounter that produced the mythic discourses of high imperialism in British India.

II

Colonel Colin Mackenzie achieved unique fame because he was primarily a man of action with a wide outlook. Though by birth a highlander, by breeding a European and by vocation an instrument of British Imperialism in India, he was a universal man.

T. V. Mahalingam, 1972

Born in 1754, Colin Mackenzie was a Scot from the outer Hebrides who went to India at the age of twenty-nine to pursue both a military career and his interest in Hindu mathematics. Mackenzie subsequently used his mathematical aptitude to become a skilled surveyor and cartographer, and carried out a series of surveys in India that differed from all others in their broad range and scholarship. In 1810 Mackenzie became the first Surveyor General of Madras, and in 1815 he was appointed the first Surveyor General of India, a post he held until his death in 1821.

When Mackenzie first arrived in India he stayed for a time in Madura, where he was introduced to "the most distinguished of the Brahmins in the neighbourhood" who were employed in collecting mathematical information for his hosts. According to Alexander Johnston, the son of these hosts and subsequently one of Mackenzie's dearest friends, "Mr. Mackenzie, in consequence of the communication which he had with them [Brahmins], soon discovered that the most valuable materials for a history of India might be collected in different parts of the peninsula, and during his

residence at Madura first formed the plan of making that collection, which afterwards became the favorite object of his pursuit for 38 years of his life. . . ."⁶ Indeed, Mackenzie spent much of his life in India compiling a massive collection of documents, manuscripts, inscriptions, drawings, and other artifacts that have since been the single richest archive for the historical, literary, and anthropological study of peninsular India during the centuries immediately preceding British rule.

Looking back over his life, in his only surviving autobiographical reflections penned in a letter to Johnston in 1817, Mackenzie noted that the first thirteen years of his life in India were substantially wasted. As he wrote, "though not devoid of opportunities, yet the circumscribed means of a subaltern officer, my limited knowledge of men in power or office, and the necessity of prompt attention to military and professional duties, did not admit of that undeviating attention which is so necessary at all times to the success of any pursuit."⁷ Like later anthropologists who have seen tradition literally disappear before their eyes, Mackenzie regretted that certain objects, as also "traits of customs and of institutions that [then] could have been explained," could not then be scrutinized by one in his constrained circumstances. In particular, Mackenzie lamented that he was unable to use those years to "assiduously cultivate" a knowledge of "the native languages." Mackenzie noted that these were years of military hardship and constant conquest: "Official encouragements to study the languages of the vast countries that have come under our domination since my arrival in India, were reserved for more happy times. . . ." For Mackenzie at least, orientalist knowledge had to follow colonial conquest.

Mackenzie was clear about his necessary complicity in the brute realities of colonial power. His early discoveries were all made on military campaigns, and Mackenzie himself conflated the role of the soldier and the scientist.

That science may derive assistance, and knowledge be diffused, in the leisure moments of camps and voyages, is no new discovery; but . . . I am also desirous of proving that, in the vacant moments of an Indian sojourn and campaign in particular (for what is the life of an Indian adventurer but one continued campaign on a more extensive scale), such collected observations may be found useful, at least in directing the observation of those more highly gifted to matters of utility, if not to record facts of importance to philosophy and science.

Mackenzie's early years thus were one continuous military campaign. And Mackenzie had no doubts about the ennobling influence of British rule, at the same time that his life has subsequently served to perpetuate the story

of Britain's rescue of India from its own decadent demise. As he wrote about the early years of his Indian sojourn: "From the evils of famine, penury, and war, the land was then slowly emerging; and it struggled long under the miseries of bad management, before the immediate administration of the south came under the benign influence of the British government." That Mackenzie's own influence has itself been seen as benign by subsequent generations of Indian historians can hardly obscure his full participation in the colonial conquest of India.

During Mackenzie's early years in the Army Engineers, he was frequently deputed to do survey work in those districts of the Deccan that had been ceded to the Company by Hydar Ali of Mysore and the Nizam of Hyderabad. Between 1792 and 1799, Mackenzie spent much of his time engaged in a survey of the "Nizam's Territories," the area encompassing what today are the districts of Cuddapah and Kurnool in Andhra Pradesh. In the course of this survey work, Mackenzie began to develop a comprehensive sense of what a survey should be. As he wrote about the area he was surveying: "The Dekhan was in fact then a *terra incognita*, of which no authentic account existed, excepting in some uncertain notices and mutilated sketches of the marches of Bussy, and in the travels of Tavernier and Thevenot, which by no means possess that philosophical accuracy demanded in modern times." Mackenzie sought therefore to make the land known, and to do so through a combination of strategies that included detailed mapping and description as well as the collection of as many local and authentic accounts as he could find.

During his surveying work in the Deccan, Mackenzie was recalled four times for military service, where his surveying and engineering skills were put to use to position artillery and act as technical advisor for assaults. Although other officers of the Company were aware of the "political as well as military"⁸ importance of Mackenzie's surveys, the last decades of the eighteenth century were times of frequent and critical military engagement for the Company. The most dramatic of Mackenzie's military assignments and the most formidable challenge to British military ambitions in peninsular India was at Seringapatam, in the fourth and final Anglo-Mysore war that took place in 1799, where the British finally defeated a ruler who had been, with his father Hydar Ali, responsible for transforming the political and social landscape of southern India during the previous forty years. During Tipu's final stand, Mackenzie was engineer in charge of the batteries to the north of the Cauvery, "from which side the successful assault was delivered."⁹

After the defeat of Tipu, Mackenzie was commissioned to organize and conduct a survey of Mysore to fix the boundaries of the newly conquered territories and to map and gain some preliminary detailed information about an area two thirds the size of Scotland. The Great Mysore Survey, as it was called, lasted from 1799 until March 1809, during which time Mackenzie maintained nominal charge over the conclusion of the Deccan survey as well. In his appointment letter he was told that his attention was not to be confined to "mere military or geographical information, but that your enquiries are to be extended to a statistical account of the whole country."¹⁰ Nevertheless, his impressively conceived scheme for a survey "embracing the statistics and history of the country, as well as its geography"¹¹ was constantly frustrated by a shortage of support from the Company, which wanted to do a survey "on the cheap" and was less convinced than Mackenzie of the need for a general plan.

Mackenzie learned that his general scheme would have to be scaled down at the end of 1801, just after he had finished his initial survey of the northern and eastern frontier of Mysore. As a result he had to discontinue his survey of the natural history of the country, had to fire a number of his principal assistants, and had his stipend and general establishment cut in half. Despite these problems, and virtually constant problems of ill health, Mackenzie conducted an extraordinarily detailed survey. In addition to preparing general maps of each district and descriptions of salient geographical features, the survey included a census of villages, forts, houses, classes of inhabitants (i.e., a breakdown of the population into its constituent castes, tribes, and occupational groups), waterworks, and so forth; historical "memoirs" of each district "illustrative of the revolutions and remarkable events of the country and of the origin and succession of the several Rajahs, Polligars, and Native Rulers for the last three centuries"; and "cursorry remarks and accounts of the soil, productions, manufactures, minerals, inhabitants, etc."¹² Even though the Board of Control never gave Mackenzie adequate financial support, it is clear that some of his most influential contemporaries appreciated the extraordinary labor of the survey. John Malcolm, then the British Resident in Poona, wrote to Mackenzie in 1803 that "the work in which you are engaged and in which you have made such considerable progress will be when it is finished highly honorable to yourself and useful to the government and that it will contain a mass of information respecting the geography, history, commerce, revenue, police and population of Mysore which must prove of the greatest advantage to every officer connected with the conduct of administration."¹³

Mackenzie's survey, commissioned so soon after the fall of Seringapatam, was necessarily limited in nature. At the outset Mackenzie informed Colonel Barry Close, the Resident of Mysore, that his survey would not "descend to the minutiae of measurements of the quantity of the cultivated and uncultivated lands, with details more properly belonging to an Agricultural Survey," concentrating rather on "full information of its [Mysore's] extent, form, and capacity in a Political and Military Light."¹⁴ Elsewhere, Mackenzie noted that "enquiries into the Revenue were altogether avoided, as tending to create an uneasiness, and possible counteraction that would have possibly retarded the progress of the other branches, without deriving sufficient advantages."¹⁵ Some years later, when giving advice to the British surveyor of Coorg, Mackenzie advised him against making "many minute enquiries," as such would "at first alarm their minds with friendless suspicions."¹⁶ In any case, the East India Company had restored the rule of the Wodiyar Rajas of Mysore, who forty years before was overthrown by the Mysore Sultans, and had no direct reason to assemble revenue information. Although he sought to collect information about the origins of land tenures, Mackenzie specifically avoided the facts of production.

Mackenzie was also reticent to engage in direct census activity. The population, he noted, "as far as depends on the number of villages and generally of houses I . . . form a gross calculation of"; but Mackenzie went on to observe that "to take an actual account [of population] would require the immediate interposition of the management, and the aversion of the natives to these enquiries are well known."¹⁷ Mackenzie felt that a gross calculation was in any case quite accurate and the best available means to procure reliable data. When writing to Elphinstone after the British conquest of the Maratha country, he wrote, "I would recommend to you by all means to get the accounts of the population according to the Hindoo system; it is nothing prejudicial to their ideas as in their own system of Police; the number of families and houses is always furnished; but you should not proceed to count heads nor cattle; nor employ the surveys in it; I only succeeded by conciliatory measures and by employing very discreet natives—the plan was entirely of their own and agreeable to ancient practice."¹⁸ He went on to emphasize that: "It was by this machinery [i.e., the use of a native establishment] only that I was enabled to complete the geometrical details of the Mysore Survey—by means of other Bramins, Jain, and all castes formed for the purpose the other Historical and Statistical investigations were carried through." Nevertheless,

at one point the Dewan of Mysore expressed his concern that "all further enquiries respecting the number of Ryots and inhabitants of either sex in Mysore may be put a stop to. . . ."¹⁹

Despite Mackenzie's limited objectives, the Company was keen to know as much as possible about the extent and nature of the newly conquered territories and, in addition to commissioning Mackenzie's survey, authorized two other Company servants to engage in surveys of their own. In November 1799, after Mackenzie had received orders for the detailed survey of Mysore, Colonel William Lambton put forward his own proposals for a "Mathematical and Geographical Survey" that would extend across the peninsula from the Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea. The proposal was accepted by the government in February 1800, and Lambton shortly thereafter began his trigonometrical survey in Mysore, using methods and measurements slightly different from Mackenzie's. Although Mackenzie was consistently generous in his official writings about Lambton, it was clear that there was always some rivalry, and less than total cooperation, between the two.

There was also some overlap between Mackenzie's survey and the investigations of Francis Buchanan, an Edinburgh-educated surgeon who in February 1800 was commissioned to investigate "the state of agriculture, arts and commerce in the fertile and valuable dominions acquired in the recent and former war, from the late sultaun of Mysore, for the purpose of obtaining such insight in to the real state of the Country, as may be productive of future improvement and advantage."²⁰ Whose advantage was not entirely made clear, since the British were not in a position to collect revenue directly from the Mysorean countryside, although they did demand an annual payment of tribute from the newly reconstituted Mysore state. Buchanan's charge seemed more generally to suggest the Company's interest in the possibilities of commercialized agriculture and expanded markets. Buchanan was asked to inventory the different crops and vegetables, the types of cultivation, the variable implements of husbandry, the different breeds of cattle, the extent of local subsistence in food production, the nature of land tenures, the cost of labor and manner of its remuneration, and the extent of money use and the kinds of local markets, as well as the various natural productions of the country "in arts, manufactures, or medicine and particularly those which are objects of external commerce." Given Buchanan's background in medicine and botany, Buchanan could give the Company the desired scientific account of the area's natural resources. The efforts to survey Mysore suffered, however, from

profound administrative confusion. Before Mackenzie was appointed Surveyor General of Madras in 1810, there was no central means or mechanism within India to coordinate activities of the kind engaged in by Mackenzie, Lambton, and Buchanan.

The most detailed part of Mackenzie's Mysore survey was his "Memoirs of the Northern Pargannahs of Mysore," the product of work conducted in 1800 and 1801 before the cutbacks. In addition to the usual statistical tables, called "Caneeshamar," Mackenzie collected numerous historical memoirs of the royal families of each region. As early as July of 1800, Mackenzie wrote that he was making some progress in his enquiries into that part of the history of "this country . . . which belongs to its Hindoo rulers and collecting all the materials I can get in the several districts of books, Inscriptions, and Traditions." He further noted that, as he did not know the local languages, he had to employ "Native Writers and Translators of the Canara, Mharatta, etc."²¹ For Chitteldroog, Mackenzie's assistants collected and translated four different family histories and then correlated the recorded genealogy of the royal family with chronological information available in local inscriptions. As Mackenzie wrote in his second report, "The Historical Accounts of the Populations of Government of the Districts were compiled from creditable sources of information on the spot; sometimes traditions from registers and chequed by dates and eras, ascertained from grants and inscriptions where they could be referred to; a reciprocal correction was frequently derived from one to the other; and more satisfactory as no communication existed between the different authorities whenever a certain internal evidence arises favorable to their accuracy."²² The royal histories, or *vamcavalis*, were received, so Mackenzie tells us, from "the official persons employed in the hereditary duties of Naadgoudes, Goudes, etc., in whose hands their records are kept." The *vamcavalis* frequently recorded why a particular group or family had settled in the place that subsequently became known as the base for their rule. Mayaconda, for example, was chosen by the Raja because when he was hunting with his dogs in its deep woods, a hare miraculously fought off the dogs and chased them back to their master. The Raja then discovered that in the days of the Vijayanagara rulers a local chief had died, and his wife Mayaca had thrown "herself into the fire of her Husband's pyre according to their law." Because of the virtue accruing to this act, and the transformation of the chief and his wife into "*veeroo-loo*" ("persons remarkable for virtue"), the site had become charged with extraordinary properties and powers. The family histories also recounted

stories of the glorious exploits and courageous rule of the relevant Rajas, thus inscribing contemporary rulers and places with special legacies and powers.

The Rajas ("Polligars") of places like Chitteldroog had for the most part met their match in the military campaigns conducted by Hydar Ali and Tipu Sultan in the last decades of the eighteenth century. Hydar and Tipu had systematically attacked the forts of the Polligars, capturing the entire royal family and carting it off to their capital city of Seringapatam. Although they often made the old rulers into honorary functionaries, such as *bukshi*, they made sure to keep them and their heirs away from their political and social bases. In their place, Hydar and Tipu placed "*amil-dars*," or managers, who were charged with the task of maintaining order and collecting revenue. This administrative centralization, very different from the kind of "feudal" incorporation deployed after military conquest by the former kings of Vijayanagara, anticipated precisely the military and administrative strategies of the East India Company. If anything, Hydar and Tipu succeeded rather better than the British in dispensing with and displacing the local political elites of the Deccan, for even by the turn of the century most British officers felt the need to rule and collect revenue through local chiefs as landlords, or "*zamindars*." Indeed, Mackenzie's studied attempt to collect the genealogical records of these displaced chiefs was due to the East India Company's desire to sort out claims of local political legitimacy and evaluate the nature and potential resistance of these forms of local political rule. Colonialism had to ease into the forms of direct rule that the sultans of Mysore had already deployed, as it happens in relation to their own strategy of developing the administrative infrastructure to enable them to oppose the spread of British rule in India.

Despite the clear political rationale for collecting information about local chiefs, Mackenzie's enthusiasm for assembling accounts full of what many of his contemporaries felt to be ethnographic trivia and historical fable was both boundless and peculiar. Even Mackenzie often doubted the utility and veracity of many of the texts that were faithfully reproduced, commenting for example on the *vamcavali* of the Jerremulla Samastan Family that "the whole of this account appears to be from tradition and very doubtful if not erroneous in dates the succession of the Polligars perhaps only excepted."²³ Other accounts were given solely "by way of specimen of what are preserved in the hands of the Natives."²⁴ Nevertheless, even though many accounts provided fascinating perspectives on the meaning of political authority and the categories of social identity, not to

mention local textual genres and sociologies of knowledge, Mackenzie was most interested in a fairly narrowly conceived historical record. His only comment in the survey records about local worship was to note that Lingum worship seemed to have at some point died out, in all probability, he conjectured, due to some as yet unknown political revolution.

However, Mackenzie clearly felt that every "traditionary account" contained some potentially useful historical information and wished to leave nothing uncollected or unexplored. Furthermore, in his 1803 annual report on the Mysore Survey, he wrote that the documents he had collected consisted "not merely of a dry chain of uninteresting facts but are connected by various illustrations of the genius and manners of the People, their several systems of Government and of Religion, and of the predominant causes that influence their sentiments and opinions to this day, lights are derived on the Tenures of Lands, the origin and variety of assessment of rents and revenues, and the condition of the People, the privileges of the different classes, and the genius and spirit of the Government prevalent generally in the south for centuries." He believed that he had successfully established that there had been a political unity under what he called the "Dominion of the Carnatic," by which he meant the rule of the Vijayanagara empire. By understanding the institutions of Hindu government that had been part of Vijayanagara rule, Mackenzie felt that the Company could gain "much useful information on many of these institutions, laws, and customs, whose influence still prevail among the various Tribes of Natives forming the general Mass of the Population at this day." Indeed, Mackenzie wrote extensively about the benefits of historical knowledge for British rule in India.

At a moment when the attention of the Governments in India and the Legislature in Europe is turned to the amelioration of the state of the Native Subjects the means of conciliating their minds; of exciting habits of industry and cultivating the arts of peace under the security and milder influence of fixed Rules it is presumed that such Investigations cannot be viewed with indifference under the Management of the East India Company whose best interests are involved in what tends to the acquisition of a more intimate knowledge of the country and its resources and the suggestions thence arising on the means of improving its revenues and commerce and promoting the prosperity of Provinces inhabited by a Population on the most moderate computation of Ten Millions of Native Subjects. (1803 Report on the Mysore Survey)

Of particular concern to Mackenzie was his sense that much local historical knowledge had perished under the same conditions of instability that

had led to a deterioration of the social and political life of the natives. Mackenzie declared that he felt it imperative to grasp "whatever opportunities existed for investigating what yet remained in the hands of the Natural Inhabitants of these countries which had escaped the general wrack and destruction of written records and more permanent monuments following the unsettled state of the country for so long a period."²⁵

Mackenzie extended his efforts well beyond the Mysore area as he became increasingly convinced of the great importance of his endeavor. At his request, a memorandum was circulated to senior British officials in southern India in 1808 that began as follows:

Major Mackenzie has for this sometime past thro the offices of his friends collected various materials that are supposed to convey considerable information on the ancient history, state, and institutions of the south of India, but he finds several parts are still doubtful, which he believes might be yet illustrated by materials of various descriptions in the hands of the natives; and which from their obscurity are liable to be neglected and lost, but might be still recovered by the interposition of the Gentlemen in the Diplomatic, Judicial, Revenue, and Medical departments particularly.

In longer detailed memos that Mackenzie circulated to officials with whom he was acquainted, he laid out in considerable detail the kinds of materials he was interested in collecting. He specified his interest in materials concerning the early history of Buddhism and Jainism in the South, as well as more generally any accounts of religious "conventions" and "establishments." He was interested in coins, antiquities of any description, drawings of ancient tombs and burial mounds, rubbings or copies of inscriptions.

Most of all, he was interested in "history." And Mackenzie had a critical sense of how history was constructed in relation both to cultural genre and political context. For example, he noted that "regular historical narrations and tracts are seldom found among the Natives, and such notices as exist, are generally preserved in the form of religious legends and popular poems and stories." Mackenzie went on the note that there were exceptions, listing:

Vumshavelly, or genealogies of the several dynasties and considerable families; Dunda Cavelly, or chronological registers and records, sometimes preserved by official persons; Calliganums, literally prophecies, but sometimes really conveying under that assumed disguise, Historical information with more apparent freedom than could be addressed to Oriental Sovereigns; Cheritra and Cudha, frequently applied to tales and popular stories, but sometimes containing correct information of remarkable characters and events ap-

proaching to the nature of our memoirs; and Rakas, financial records and registers of the ancient revenues and resources of the country.²⁶

Thus Mackenzie justified and explained his eclectic interests and procedures, aware all the while of the problems of authenticity, as he wrote to Connor: "If during the Survey you can get any notices of the History of the Country in Canara, it would be preferable to a made up Persian account as being more original."²⁷ And, rather than despair over the ahistoricism of the oriental mind, he assumed that non- or quasi-historical genres, such as prophecies and popular stories, were less historical than they might otherwise have been in order to disguise their political and therefore dangerous nature.

One of the reasons that Mackenzie had a much clearer sense of the politics of knowledge than most of his colonial compatriots was that he was deeply involved in the actual collection of historical information. He assumed neither that he could conduct his work without the myriad efforts of native assistants nor that this work would constitute only a set of technical problems. Mackenzie seems to have been unique not only in the degree to which he trusted his native assistants but also in the extent of his involvement in their own struggles to procure historical knowledge in the context of the complex politics of early colonial conquest and rule in India.

III

The connexion than formed with one person, a native and a Bramin, was the first step of my introduction into the portal of Indian knowledge; devoid of any knowledge of the languages myself, I owe to the happy genius of this individual, the encouragement and the means of obtaining what I so long sought. . . . From the moment the talents of the lamented Boria were applied, a new avenue to Hindoo knowledge was opened. . . .

Colin Mackenzie, 1817

Mackenzie's concern to ameliorate the state of native subjects and to collect historical information concerning them did not rest on the kinds of characterizations of India and Indians engaged in by many of his assistants. Benjamin Heyne, a naturalist and friend of Mackenzie's who accompanied him on the Mysore survey, was a particularly outspoken critic of Indian character: "In general it may be said of the Mysoreans that they are exactly like the other Hindoos, no better nor worse; They have the same

propensities of lying, cheating, domineering. They are equally perfidious, fickle, dissembling, inconstant, treacherous, adulterous, as their Eastern and Northern neighbors. They are on the other hand courteous, polite, resigned, and endowed with most passive virtues."²⁸ Thus anticipating Macauley's remarks about Bengalees in his essay on Warren Hastings by some forty years, Heyne made clear what must have been a prevailing attitude among many of Mackenzie's early colonial associates. Heyne differed substantially from Mackenzie in his assessment of the state of Indian knowledge. He wrote that he found virtually no learned men among the Hindus and that all local knowledge—whether concerning medicine or that embodied in local texts, songs, and dramas—was either quackery or a "mere travesty" of classical Sanskrit sources. But if Heyne highlights Mackenzie's particular commitment to engaging local knowledge, he also anticipates the kind of view that shortly thereafter became enshrined as official colonial knowledge about India.

What distinguished Mackenzie and his general project most from his colonial contemporaries was his respect for and reliance on local Indians for information and scholarly assistance. The pages of the Mysore survey betray in particular the ubiquitous and pervasive presence of Mackenzie's chief interpreter, a man by the name of Kavelli Venkata Boria. Mackenzie met Boria in 1796, and quickly recognized the young man's brilliance, as well as his potential importance to his own project of discovering India. Mackenzie wrote that Boria, "of the quickest genius and disposition," possessed "that conciliatory turn of mind that soon reconciled all sects and all tribes to the course of inquiry followed with these surveys." Boria was, as Mackenzie said, "the first step of my introduction into the portal of Indian knowledge."

Mackenzie's first concern was his own lack of linguistic skills, and also the appalling lack of official British competence in southern India's languages. He noted that on the reduction of Seringapatam in 1799 "not one of our people could translate form the Kanarese alone." For the Mysore Survey, Mackenzie noted that he confronted a situation where "no less than 5 Provincial Languages are used by so many different distinctions of natives constituting the great mass of population exclusive of four others that are occasionally requisite in more literary inquiries." As he noted, "a Satisfactory Investigation and access to the Sentiments of the people as well as to that knowledge derived from a ready intercourse would be a matter of serious difficulty and concern."²⁹ Mackenzie made it clear he had to have an extremely talented establishment of linguists.

Mackenzie went on to say, however, that the requisite skills for the

work of his survey and associated antiquarian pursuits were combined in the person of Boria himself, "whose industry and perseverance were not more useful to my Geographical pursuits than his integrity and conciliatory spirit were instrumental to the rapid progress and favorable reception of these Enquiries in the minds of the Natives."³⁰ Boria had formidable linguistic skills, with command of Tamil, Telugu, Kanarese, and Sanskrit, as well as considerable skill in deciphering medieval inscriptional scripts and grammars. As Mackenzie's chief interpreter, he worked to collect texts, traditions, and materials of diverse kinds and also to explain and translate their contents. He also prepared most of the papers on the Northern Purgunnahs, including an extensive "Memoir on the mode of management observed in the Ballaghaat," in addition to his collections and translations "confirmed by such other evidence as leaves little room of doubt." After Boria's death, Mackenzie assembled a testimonial about Boria's extraordinary linguistic skills and scholarly credentials from a Madras orientalist by the name of A. Falconar, Persian Translator to Government.³¹ Although Boria died in 1803, still a young man who had been only seven years in Mackenzie's service, he recruited and trained an establishment of learned Brahmans, including two brothers and various relations and acquaintances, thereby institutionalizing what became Mackenzie's lifelong project of "collecting" India. Time after time Mackenzie professed that it was only through the merits and assiduity of his "native establishment" that he was able "to engage in those Researches into the nature and state of the country which have enabled me to collect the materials on this undertaking."³²

Though many of these declarations took place in letters to the government pleading for further support for his establishment, it was on his own initiative and largely with his own resources that Mackenzie hired and trained his group of Brahman assistants. Beginning in 1796, with efforts intensifying after 1799, Mackenzie's establishment helped him collect epigraphical evidence and local histories of kingly dynasties, chiefly families, castes, villages, temples, and monasteries, as well as other local traditions and religious and philosophical texts in Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, Tamil, Telugu, Kanarese, Malayalam, and Hindi. Mackenzie went far beyond even the ambitious scheme he had proposed for a proper survey, employing additional staff as his circumstances permitted to travel around peninsular India, first with him and then on their own, collecting every "traditionary account" they could find. When Mackenzie died in 1821, he had amassed a collection of 3,000 stone and copper plate inscriptions, 1,568 literary manuscripts, 2,070 local tracts, and large portfolios and col-

lections of drawings, plans, images, and antiquities. As Alexander Johnston wrote in 1832, Mackenzie's was "the most extensive and the most valuable collection of historical documents relative to India that was ever made by any individual in Europe or in Asia."

It was during the Mysore survey that Mackenzie's own collection of materials really escalated. As Mackenzie wrote, while the survey work was being conducted, "the collection of materials on the history, antiquities, and statistics of the country was going on throughout the whole of the provinces, under the presidency of Fort St. George, on the basis of the information originally obtained on the Mysore survey, by natives trained and instructed by me for this purpose." Mackenzie stressed that this process had cost the government little, since "all the purchases have been entirely at my private expense, as well as the collection of MSS. Throughout the Karnatik Malabar, the southern provinces, the Cirkars, and the Dekhan." Clearly Mackenzie felt that the British government should take more active interest in his endeavors; "the success of these investigations," he wrote, "justifies the hope, that considerable advantage may be derived from following up the same plan of research wherever the influence of the British government affords the same facilities, in the intervals of military occupation."³³

During the Mysore Survey, Mackenzie realized not only that his native staff was indispensable for the task of collecting and translating historical, geographical, and ethnographical materials but that his native assistants were in a position to mediate a complex sociology of local knowledge, one in which, as noted above, indigenous inhabitants often greeted British curiosity with "friendless suspicion." Mackenzie was particularly concerned not to use the kind of intimidation that apparently accompanied most attempts—whether by British officials or the amildars of Tipu Sultan—to collect local knowledge, writing that "The persons and properties of the Inhabitants have been protected from all violence of any kind with me, and I have particularly attended to conciliate their minds, which was indeed necessary for easier obtaining my object."³⁴ But the difficulties encountered in collecting survey-related information only constituted the tip of the iceberg in "friendless suspicion." Mackenzie himself was never unaware of the potential resistance to hand over information, as also of the inverse problem that if he did not exercise scrupulous caution he would get only the kind of information that his informants thought he desired. As he wrote to P. Connor in 1816, "I presume you are yourself sufficiently aware of the Native character in general, to know that express-

ing any extraordinary anxiety or solicitude for any particular object is the sure way to excite suspicion, delay, and sometimes opposition—Some apparent indifference is useful and necessary and I want to recommend your abstaining from taking notes of your remarks on their answers to questions in their presence.”³⁵ Questions of authority, and of the myriad relations between power and knowledge, were raised over and over again in the accumulation of Mackenzie’s archive.

During the first two decades of the nineteenth century, Mackenzie’s assistants traveled widely throughout peninsular India, collecting, copying, and translating materials, all the while corresponding regularly with Letchmia, who had replaced his brother Boria as Mackenzie’s chief assistant after Boria’s death. Letters to Letchmia often included lists of material, long synopses of particular traditions and histories, and extensive itineraries and accounts of the successes and failures of individual attempts to collect material. Frequently the letters, written in ungrammatical English, sought additional authority to enable the assistants to persuade local people to allow them access to various forms of knowledge. In areas not under direct British rule, such as Travancore, Mackenzie’s men had to use their wits. According to C. Appavoo: “Mr. Ward told Mr. Turnbull that he cannot get any order to procure the histories etc. in this country. Coll. Munro told him he cannot give order to the country people to furnish any informations, but the servants may make friendships with the country people and get the old accounts of the Rajahs.”³⁶ But in adjacent parts of British India, Munro, a good friend of Mackenzie’s and a constant supporter of the latter’s antiquarian efforts, gave written orders to the surveyors for the managers of each district, requesting their assistance. In other areas, Mackenzie’s men had frequently to turn to the local British Collector. When Seenevassiah journeyed to Matorantakum and Chittamoorjee in 1809, he began copying temple inscriptions, only to be told by the temple priest that he must stop: “then the Bramin of the Pagoda they prevented me and told me that they want order of the Circar, therefore next day I went to the Cachary at Caroong Cooly and acquainted with the Collector Mr. Hide, who told me now you may go, they do not prevent you, accordingly I went afternoon to the pagoda and seen all the inscriptions.” Most assistants reported that before they copied inscriptions or local texts, they attempted to use their own letters from Mackenzie to procure letters from the local Collector. Mackenzie only was known in some places, and only he could have authority attached to his name through the confirmation of locally known British officials.

Mackenzie’s assistants were mostly Brahmans, although he employed a number of Christians and at least one Jain. When they first went to a village to begin their enquiries, they typically asked to be taken to the learned Brahmans of the place. At times the approaches were made directly, as when Nitala Naina “privately made friendship with one of the learned Bramin there named Soobausastry who had a large library of holy and pious books. . . . I gave him a one rupee present.” In most cases the Brahmans who were contacted deployed local networks to assist the task. Sooba Row recorded in 1807 that “I was acquainted that a learned Shastry had preserved some ancient Pooranums therefore I went to his house made friendship with him and asked him that he had any ancient Pooranums etc., he told that he will examine all his books and give me a list of the books that I may take copy of. I also told him to enquire if any learned Bramin got any records of the ancient kings and any inscriptions of copper plates.” In this case the Shastry recommended that Soobarow talk with his father, who was a repository of the ancient customs of the kingdom, and the letter reports an extensive interview with him. Other Brahmans were also sent for, so that by the time Sooba Row was ready to leave town he had talked with half a dozen learned Brahmans of the locality. On other occasions a local headman was asked to collect the learned Brahmans. For example, Appavoo wrote in a report of 1817: “Today many Brahmans and learned people were collected by the Head Hicharadaur at Caspa in Arcot agreeable to the directions of the Collector’s people. They gave me many informations respecting Arcot.” In another report, C. V. Ram wrote: “I was enquiring for the history of Cacati Rajaloo, who are ruled at Aunomacondah, and Vorungale, I understand there was a aged learned Bramin at Aunomacondah, who knows the History of the ancient kings of the Cacatirajaloo, who has a library of cadjan books, as it is impossible to appear myself to him at his house, I was intending to make friendship with him thro the means of his acquaintance. . . . I requested him to order the old Bramin to give me any information of the former kings of the country, and explain me the difficult inscriptions.” The subsequent information in the report was then based almost exclusively on the words of this old Bramin.

Knowledge was never imparted without suspicion and the direct invocation of some British authority. When British authority was not absolute, as mentioned above, there were frequent difficulties such as those encountered by C. V. Ram, who wrote that when he was in the zamin of Calastray, he was copying certain inscriptions in the large temple,

but "after we copied three inscriptions the Rajah sent for us and directed us not to copy any more stone inscriptions with an intention of exposing the secrets of their samasthanam [kingdom]." Narrain Row wrote of similar difficulties in his visit to Gudwall. In this case he went directly to the local zamindar to present his credentials: a Persian letter from Mackenzie. The Dewan, Narrain Row reports, "enquired of me what is the use of this books Tarraureeks and Vumshavaley [chronicles and genealogies], I replied him, My Master is very desirous of knowing the curious history of the old king for that I came here." The Raja responded by preparing a letter for Mackenzie and offering Narrain Row the customary honor of betel nut. He then escorted him out of the kingdom.

Perhaps the most extraordinary story of this kind was related by Nitala Naina about his attempts to procure information about the history of the ruling Tondaiman family of Pudukkottai. Upon presenting himself and his certificate to the "Tondamaun Palagar," he was told that he had "no reason to enquire the informations." Dispirited by this interview, he turned to Sivaraumia, one of the local Brahmans he had employed to help him copy manuscripts, for advice. Sivaraumia promised that he would be able to give him two hundred books about the history of the Tondamaun country. Sivaraumia also spoke disparagingly about the Raja, saying that he was a "little Palagar in the crowd of 72 Palagars." It soon became clear, however, that Sivaraumia had done something to displease the Tondaiman court and was less than forthcoming with the materials he kept promising. As time went on, Nitala Naina got further and further imbricated in a web of intrigue centering on this man, who used every trick in the book to excuse himself for delays while making Naina increasingly dependent on him. A sample of Naina's report goes like this: "On the next day, the Sivaraumia brought up two books, Mallopooranum, and the book of Tondamaun Genealogy, it is composed in the Telenga language. I then asked him to get the particular account of Tondamaun with the dates, he answered me he would go and enquire and bring it to me. I told him you did not get any complete accounts since these five months; he says he would show his progress of ten years in a day. I am told then the Sivaraumia is consulting with Teroomul Nayudoo without enquiring any informations. One day he told me he want to go soon to Tondamaun for the books, and will require some bullocks for them." In the end, this was all that was produced. Meanwhile Naina's association with Sivaraumia made him suspect in the eyes of the Tondaiman court, which came to believe the claims of another man that that man in fact was the true representative of Mackenzie, Nitala Naina having been dismissed. When Naina finally

turned in despair to one of Sivaraumia's sworn enemies for help, he found that he had to promise that he would recommend employment for him in Mackenzie's service to induce him to hand over some books. Naina soon left in some disgrace, finding that he had to persuade Mackenzie that he had been conscientiously employed over a period of six months with little to show for it.

Mackenzie's assistants typically reported material they collected with little editorial comment, so relieved perhaps were they to be able to document their own productive labor. Although the assistants distinguished material on the basis of whether it was copied from a book, told by a local Brahman, or written down from the remarks of a village headman or chief, only rarely did they make the kinds of comments made by British observers regarding the promiscuous admixture of "historical" and "fabulous" materials. Sooba Row was an exception, writing that a tradition about the capture of the idol at Srirangam by Sri Lankan forces "is founded on real historical facts tho disguised by the fancy of the poet and the clouds of religious prejudice." More frequently, moral tales, extraordinary stories of the exploits of kings and heroes, and attempts to date dynasties were strung together in single narratives, with occasional asides about the difficulty of collecting information. Editorial comments reflecting modern concerns about textual genre and empirical truth were made more often at the point that certain texts were copied and translated, for example when the rough translations and texts from the field were put together in a set of bound volumes during the final years of Mackenzie's life under his direct supervision. Perhaps the most extraordinary example of this is seen in the preface of a text titled by Mackenzie *Mootiah's Chronological and Historical Accounts of the Modern Kings of Madura*. It begins like this:

I turned my thoughts towards the Chronological and Historical Accounts of the Gentoo Kings of Madura written upon Palmyra leaves in a vulgar style of the Tamil language which I found to be satisfactory but the same being in a confused order and full of tautologies and repetitions which, if I proceed to translate literally into the English, it would prove absurd in the sight of the learned, I have therefore, in my following version of the said account, omitted the tautological and repeated expressions and set aside prolixity but following laconism, digested the Chronicles into eleven chapters and preamble prefixed thereto.³⁷

Here, the rectification of the text was clearly being done for British, or what were perceived as British, textual and historical sensibilities. But in the reports from the field, there are few traces of this kind of rectification.

Nevertheless, the texts that were being collected and produced in the

field were hardly authentic survivals of a pre-British sociology of knowledge, even as they participated in complex power-knowledge relations well outside the purview of specific colonial concerns. Appavoo, one of Mackenzie's Christian assistants, was at times forthcoming about attempts by Brahmans to suppress certain kinds of local traditions: "Here, by the Brahmans, the history of Jainas and Cooroombers are much concealed. As there is not a single learned Jaina and Cooroomber in the Jaghere, their written histories are very rare with the exception of some informations concerning them. . . . As Brahmans and other nations bear a great enmity at them, many refuse to give me such information in my route." Subsequently, he found an excellent Coorumber informant, who told him that "they were the most ancient nation derived from the Bedars and first had the entire sovereignty of the Carnata and Dravida Desums." He took it to be natural that such claims were suppressed by the Brahmans. Unsurprisingly, Mackenzie's Brahman assistants never made comments of this kind.

Some of the texts collected by Mackenzie's assistants were directly intended for British consumption. For example, a number of chieftains whose kingdoms had been defeated and/or expropriated by the Sultans of Mysore or the representatives of the East India Company produced texts that read more like petitions than either myths or histories. For example, one text reads as follows: "I am a descendant of the family of Teroomaly Naick the most famous of the Gentoo kings of Madura and Trichinopoly. . . . Yet to the reverse of my misfortune, General MacDowal, who commanded Tanjore, having been informed of the chronicles of the said kings and also of my being their surviving Rajah, living incognito at Sevaganga, was pleased to signify his anxiety to have an interview with me . . . this gentleman received me with all marks of joy and honour and having enquired me about my welfare and also about the historical accounts of my ancestors, advised me to wait upon your Lordship [Mackenzie]." And it is likely that all texts were fashioned in relation to a variety of interests and concerns. Mackenzie's concerns to avoid direct enquiries about production and revenue did not mean that the revenue implications of any knowledge about local tenures or lineages might not be used by an imperial power that was at this very time establishing itself as a revenue state. Virtually all of the information collected by Mackenzie turned out to concern the rights and privileges of kings, chiefs, headmen, Brahmans, and religious institutions. There was good reason for "friendless suspicion."

But the collection of information meant the appropriation of knowl-

edge in more than just a revenue-related sense. When local documents were collected, authority and authorship were transferred from local to colonial contexts. The different voices, agencies, and modes of authorization that were implicated in the production of the archive got lost once they inhabited the archive. Distinctions between types of texts (e.g., texts that derived from ancient authorship or the hastily transcribed remarks from a local source) and concerns about the use-value of knowledge (how textual knowledge might be used to de-authorize and de-legitimate), became blurred and increasingly dissolved at each stage of the collection, transcription, textualization, translation, and canonization of the archive. And the role of Mackenzie's native assistants became relegated to the position of technical mediation, the diaries and letters rarely if ever recopied and collated with the documents they discuss. Indeed, the East India Company saw little reason other than a respect for Mackenzie's oft-expressed concerns for the welfare of his staff to maintain any of his native assistants after the master's death. A number of Mackenzie's assistants had been pensioned off after Mackenzie moved from Madras to Calcutta in 1818. Letchmia was kept on, in charge of a small residual staff, but his role was significantly diminished after Mackenzie died.

IV

A collection was formed at a considerable cost of time, labour and expence, which no individual exertions have ever before accumulated, or probably will again assemble. Its composition is of course very miscellaneous, and its value with respect to Indian history and statistics remains to be ascertained, the collector himself having done little or nothing towards a verification of its results.

H. H. Wilson, 1828

Despite Mackenzie's enthusiasm, it is clear that the British government was always somewhat reserved about the value of his endeavors. As we already noted, allowances for the Mackenzie Survey had been drastically cut in 1801, with deleterious consequences not only for implementation of the survey but also for more extensive researches. Although at various points Company and government officials expressed their approbation, Mackenzie's career prospered chiefly because of his abundantly evident surveying and administrative skills, and also because he was among the

most dedicated and hard working Company servants or his time. As the Chief Secretary of Government in Madras wrote in October of 1807, "in the zealous execution of the duties of the arduous undertaking in which he has been so long engaged . . . and in honourable disinterestedness, I do not believe that Major Mackenzie is surpassed by any Publick Officer in India."³⁸

There was never any doubt about Mackenzie's surveying and cartographic talent. James Rennell, the architect of the Bengal Survey and the senior cartographer of the early Raj, wrote about the "masterly manner" of Mackenzie's Survey: "The discrimination of the different objects is such as to render an idea of the nature of the country, perfectly clear on inspection. And I doubt not but the accuracy is equal to the execution. It is also a work of great magnitude in respect to its superficial extent; being, if I mistake not, considerably larger than the kingdom of Ireland."³⁹ And the Board of Directors in London received the materials of the Mysore Survey with evident admiration. In their dispatch dated February 9, 1810, they noted that

it is a great pleasure to us to bestow our unqualified and warm commendation upon his long-continued, indefatigable, and zealous exertions in the arduous pursuits in which he was employed, and upon the works which those exertions have produced. . . . The actual survey, upon geometrical principles, of a region containing above 40,000 square miles, generally of an extremely difficult surface, full of hills and wilderness, presenting few facilities or accommodations for such a work, and never before explored by European science, in a climate very insalubrious, is itself no common performance; and the minute divisions and details of places of every description given in the memoirs of the survey, with the masterly execution, upon a large scale, of the general map, and its striking discrimination of different objects, rarely equalled by any thing of the same nature that has come under our observation,—form altogether an achievement of extraordinary merit, adding most materially to the stores of Indian geography, and of information useful for military, financial, and commercial purposes.

So impressed were the members of the Board of the potential utility of Mackenzie's maps and memoirs that they declared that the survey was not to be published, that "no copy of his map, or of the division of it, further than for the public offices just mentioned, ought to be permitted to be taken."⁴⁰

The Board also expressed its appreciation of Mackenzie's "superadded inquiries into the history, the religion, and the antiquities of the country" that, admittedly, Mackenzie's "other fatiguing avocations might have been

pleaded as an excuse for not attending." Although casting some doubt on the actual "authenticity" of the records collected, as also on the general wisdom of an enterprise that seemed to require such "excessive labour," the Board allowed "that this effort promises the fairest of any which has yet been made to bring from obscurity any scattered fragments of true history which exist, and undoubtedly encourages the expectation of ultimately obtaining both considerable insight into the state of the country and its governments in more modern periods, and some satisfactory indications of its original institutions and earlier revolutions." Mackenzie himself responded quite insistently to the doubts about the authenticity of the grants to Brahmans, which made up the subject of most of the inscriptions as well as many of the manuscripts, noting that "not an instance of forgery has been discovered or even suspected, save one, (and that rather assists history)." Of particular interest in the Board's comment about Mackenzie's historical labors was that the lack of "real history and chronology" in India was taken as evidence not of the lack of historical consciousness but rather of the "commotions and changes" that had been so "unfavourable to the preservation of political records." India's lack of history—and of a sense of history—had not yet become colonial orthodoxy.

The Board's evaluation of Mackenzie's collection was based largely on earlier correspondence by Bentinck, Governor of Madras, Mark Wilks, British Resident in Mysore, and John Malcolm, Resident of Poona, in response to widespread recognition in Madras that Mackenzie was not being adequately supported and encouraged by the government. Bentinck observed that "the valuable collection of manuscripts and other documents of the highest antiquity which that officer has been enabled to procure, may be expected to throw useful light on the dark ages of Oriental history, and to be equally valuable as a guide in the pursuit of literary knowledge, as in the attainment of correct information with regard to the former tenures of property and the laws of the ancient dynasties of the peninsula of India."⁴¹ Bentinck seemed fully aware of the importance of his collection for the general project of British rule, and he feared that only Mackenzie would be able to make sense of these manuscripts, for no one else had his experience and expertise. "The object will be accomplished by him, or it will probably never be accomplished, even if his materials in their present state were to fall into other hands, they might be considered as lost. . . ." He strongly recommended that London realize the importance of both the manuscripts and the man, and at the very least reimburse him for his actual expenditures.

Although Mark Wilks, who in 1817 published his three-volume work *Historical Sketches of the South of India* with extensive references to Mackenzie's collection, was perhaps the most enthusiastic advocate of Mackenzie's historical labors, he was in fact highly doubtful of the historical value of anything other than the inscriptions. "The Department of history in this country," he wrote, "is so deformed by fable and anachronism, that it may be considered as an absolute blank in Indian literature." Wilks went on to suggest what most Indian historians since then have thought, namely that Indian "historical" texts and chronicles are so sullied by myth and fancy that they would be useful only to trace developments in Indian literature in late medieval and early modern times. Wilks turned, however, to the inscriptional record for southern India, to which Mackenzie had contributed so much by making rubbings of thousands of stone and copper plate inscriptions. He opined that

There is but one mode which appears to afford the most distant hope of supplying this important defect. The grants generally of a religious nature inscribed on stone and copper plates which are to be found in every part of the south of India are documents of a singularly curious texture, they almost always fix the chronology, and frequently unfold the genealogy and military history of the Donor and his ancestors, with all that is remarkable in their civil institutions or religious reforms.

Thus anticipating the procedures of most subsequent Indian historiography, Wilks assumed that, since history is predicated on chronology, inscriptions are preferable to other texts. Inscriptions could be used to date kings, reigns, wars, and other events; whereas Mackenzie's texts—loose composites of oral and literary tradition that could rarely be definitively dated or trusted—seemed to constitute their own internal set of time referents, events, and structures and did not succumb easily to master historical narratives and appropriations.

Wilks also shared Bentinck's official view of the value of any reliable historical information about the nature of landed property. As he wrote, "If it should be found practicable to trace by a series of authentic documents the history of landed property in the south of India, I imagine that no subject of superior interest and importance can be presented to the attention of a British Government." Wilks was "certain that the research would unfold the most useful information on many important points connected with the political economy and good Government of India." Indeed, no other subject so exercised British official opinion in

the early years of the nineteenth century, particularly in southern India where the debate between advocates of the Permanent Settlement with landlords (zamindars) and those, following Munro, who favored direct (or ryotwari) settlement with the "cultivators" was raging. Although Wilks was less interested in religion, he did note that Mackenzie had opened important new windows on the understanding of the history of Hinduism. Noting that the religion of the Hindus "is usually represented as unchanged and unchangeable," he remarked that "the religious history of Europe is scarcely less pregnant with revolutions" and that "everything in short that is usually considered most interesting and instructive in general history may be traced and illustrated," by Mackenzie's texts.

Although Bentinck had clearly regretted for some years that his hands had been tied by the Board of Control from remunerating Mackenzie properly for his efforts, the final result of this correspondence was that the Company recognized Mackenzie's contribution, increased his salary by 50 percent, gave him a monthly stipend to rent a house to maintain his establishment, and endowed him with an account for at least some of his research expenses, "trusting that it will not amount to any large sum." The Board also expressed its hope that Mackenzie's new position of "Barrack-master" in Mysore, to which he was appointed at the conclusion of the Mysore Survey, would afford him the necessary leisure to "digest and improve the materials he has collected." But just a few months later, at the end of 1810, the government of Madras created a position Mackenzie had long (for fourteen years) advocated, Surveyor-General of Madras, and appointed him to it. As Mackenzie put it, the government suddenly responded both to the increased costs of its surveys and the "unconnected confused manner in which these works were executed, without any general fixed system." However, Mackenzie's recognition and elevation made it even more difficult for him to find the time to work on his historical interests, and that too at the very moment he was to be supported to do precisely this. No sooner did Mackenzie settle down to his new administrative position than he was engaged as Chief Engineer⁴² for a British expeditionary force that captured Java from the French in 1811. As before, he made an extensive collection of materials, including both descriptive maps and charts and extensive collections and translations of Dutch, Javanese, and Malay manuscripts.⁴³ Also as before, Mackenzie spent a good deal of his energy looking into the "history and antiquities of the island," for which he seems to have been accorded more ready interest, as well as financial support, than had ever been the case in India. Mackenzie himself,

interestingly, lamented only that "the powerful aid of the penetrating acute genius of the Brahmans which had been of such importance in India, was here wanting."⁴⁴

When, after a short sojourn in Calcutta, Mackenzie finally returned to Madras in 1815, he arrived just in time to learn that his office of Surveyor-General at Madras was to be abolished. His disappointment was tempered by the fact that he learned simultaneously that he was to be appointed Surveyor-General of India, the first occupant of this prestigious post. By this time, however, Mackenzie's health was fragile and his age told heavily on his energy. He wrote that after learning of his new appointment, his attention had, "in consequence been chiefly turned to that object ever since, with the view of fulfilling the Honourable Court's intentions in an appointment which I must ever consider an honourable mark of their distinction, that justly demands efforts that I had no longer in contemplation." It soon became clear that he had to move his base from Madras to Calcutta, the capital of British rule in India, and in 1817, after completing the memoirs for the survey of the Ceded Districts along the same lines as he done for Mysore, he left Madras for the last time.

Mackenzie's new administrative responsibilities, and his move to Calcutta, seriously retarded his historical research. In particular, he found that it was difficult to move his establishment out of southern India: "The individuals reared by me for several years being natives of the Coast or the Southern provinces and almost as great strangers to Bengal and Hindostan as Europeans, their removal to Calcutta is either impracticable, or where a few from personal and long attachment (as my head Brahmin, Jain translator, and others), are willing to give this last proof of their fidelity, yet still it is attended with considerable expence." Without his full establishment, Mackenzie correctly worried that "most of what I had proposed to condense and translate from the originals in the languages of their country could not be conveniently, or at all, effected in Calcutta."

Nevertheless, Mackenzie was determined to attempt it, planning, "in this last stage, preparatory to my return to Europe, to effect a condensed view of the whole collection and a catalogue raisonnée of the native manuscripts and books etc. and to give the translated materials such form as may at least facilitate the production of some parts, should they ever appear to the public by persons better qualified, if the grateful task be not permitted to my years or to my state of health." Mackenzie went on to suggest to Johnston that it would, he hoped, "appear to all considerate

men, that some leisure and tranquil exclusive application of an arrangement of these [materials] would be at least necessary to one who has now resided thirty-four years in this climate, without the benefits of once going to Europe."

Even at this stage, Mackenzie received little support or sympathy from Company officials, who never gave any indication of their genuine commitment to Mackenzie's historical labors. In the meanwhile, Johnston advocated his friend's cause, calling on Charles Grant, the former Chairman of the Court of Directors, to attempt to persuade him of "the great advantage it would secure for Oriental history and literature, were Col. Mackenzie to be allowed by the Directors to come to England upon leave, in order that he might, with the assistance of the different literary characters in Europe, arrange his valuable collection of materials." Grant apparently responded favorably, but did nothing before Johnston learned that Mackenzie had died in Calcutta in 1821, still "without having had leisure to engage in the preparation of any condensed view of his collections."⁴⁵

V

Archaeology describes discourses as practices specified in the element of the archive.

Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 131

We are left with silence. For not only did Mackenzie fail to prepare a "condensed view" or a "Catalogue Raisonné," he wrote little about either the collection itself or his sense of its significance beyond what I have already recorded. Most of his publications were in fact nothing more than annotated editions of texts translated by his assistants. The only exceptions were a couple of papers on the significance of Jainism in the history of southern India, as well as a long paper submitted at a meeting of the Royal Asiatic Society in April of 1815, entitled: "View of the principal Political Events that occurred in the Carnatic, from the dissolution of the Ancient Hindoo Government in 1564 till the Mogul Government was established in 1687, on the Conquest of the Capitals of Beejapoor and Golconda; compiled from various authentic Memoirs and Original MSS., collected chiefly

within the last ten years, and referred to in the Notes at the bottom of each page." The title alone reveals the emphasis on sources, specifically on their authenticity and originality, as well as his concentration on establishing the chronology and circumstances of the principal political events of southern India's history.

Aside from these few traces, Mackenzie leaves the weight of a voluminous, detailed, and dry official correspondence, which demonstrates his attention to duty and confirms the judgment of the Company in elevating him to positions of seniority in the surveying of colonial India. And he leaves us his collection. Since Mackenzie so rarely spoke for the collection, we must let the collection speak for him—but not for him in the sense that we might wish to use the collection to trace the originary voice of an author or the guiding presence of a master orientalist. Although Mackenzie had clear ideas about what kinds of materials and texts he wanted, and communicated these ideas in both direct and indirect ways to the people who collected things for him, he was so obsessive a collector that his principal interest sometimes seemed to be sheer accumulation. The collection—its texts, drawings, marginalia, antiquities, and diaries—is a sedimentation of myriad voices. Some of the most prominent voices are those of the "native establishment" itself, not just Boria and Letchmia but also Nitala Naina, Wedhanayagam Siromony, and Babu Rao, among others. Other voices can be heard in the texts themselves, sometimes ascribed to a village Brahman, an ancient sage, or a regional ruler. As we have seen, Mackenzie's historiographical concerns and modes of collection opened his archive to voices that were rarely heard.

The collection of these voices in a colonial archive, however, undermined both Mackenzie's idiosyncratic project and our capacity to hear the voices themselves any longer. In the catalogs assembled by Wilson and then Taylor, and even more in the official administrative uses of and references to the Mackenzie Collection later in the century, the voices become anonymous footnotes for a new kind of colonial knowledge.⁴⁶ Our attempt to specify and sort these voices is further frustrated by the fact that the textual traditions represented in the archive have, despite Mackenzie's own eclectic historiographical sensibility, been seen as subversive of the standards of authority, authorship, and authenticity that have motivated the last two hundred years of western textual scholarship. The archive now known as the Mackenzie Collection sediments far more than the original voices I have tried to uncover in this chapter; it has also been the deposi-

tory for Wilson's disinterest, more generalized orientalist contempt, and the monumental incompetence of the Reverend William Taylor, the man who was appointed to succeed Wilson. Colonized voices have been written over even where they were most deeply inscribed in the early archives of colonial knowledge.

As much as Mackenzie was clearly an instrument of British imperialism in India, as Mahalingam so succinctly put it, his life and his collection stand at a bit of an angle to many aspects of early colonial rule. Mackenzie was not alone in his historical interests—they were certainly shared by Wilks, Malcolm, Elphinstone, Raffles, and myriad other British officials of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Unlike these other men, however, Mackenzie was unable to produce a master historical narrative of his own, and he set up an apparatus of collection that turned up works even most colonial historians found difficult to esteem. The collection's first and most eminent bibliographer, H. H. Wilson, became progressively less interested in Mackenzie's project the more he worked on it, casting doubt on the historical value of many of the texts. Bentinck's fears were almost realized when Wilson came close to abandoning the project before its completion. And the Company Directors complained that they had been presented with the collection as a fait accompli on payment of 10,000 pounds to Mackenzie's widow shortly after the colonel's death. They noted also that the portion of materials they had seen "does not lead us to form any very favourable opinion of the value of the remainder."⁴⁷ The maps remained as proud documents of British conquest, and it is no accident that Mackenzie's name receives its fullest and most unambiguous praise in the histories of the survey of India. But the texts, the fabulous myths, confused chronicles, and chaotic epistles from his collectors, with all that they tell us about the collisions of context and meaning, power, and knowledge, have gathered far more dust than ink.

Concerns by men such as Bentinck and Johnston about Mackenzie's silence had progressively fewer echoes in the subsequent history of his collection. Wilson's catalog was, as we have seen, ambivalent about the worth of the collection. As soon as Wilson completed his initial catalog, published in 1828, he dropped the project completely. When Mackenzie's chief assistant, Cavelly Venkata Letchmia, applied to the Madras division of the Asiatic Society to carry on Mackenzie's work of collection and cataloging after the master's death, the society rejected the application on the grounds that no oriental would be able to do the managerial and critical

work necessary to oversee such a project. According to the head of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, James Prinsep, "Such an extensive scheme would need the control of a master head, accustomed to generalization, and capable of estimating the value of drift of inscriptional and literary evidence. The qualifications of Cavelly Venkata for such an office, judging of them by his 'abstract,' or indeed of any native [my emphasis], could hardly be pronounced equal to such a task, however useful they may prove as auxiliaries in such a train of research."⁴⁸ Instead, they hired Taylor, a missionary in Madras and self-professed orientalist, who can only be judged, even in nineteenth-century colonial terms, as at best a poor scholar, and more accurately as an eccentric and somewhat deranged antiquarian.

The history of the Mackenzie collection thus demonstrates the consolidation of a new epistemic regime, in which the progress of textual scholarship became progressively linked to the conventions and certainties of a British colonial sociology of India. This history of silence also tells the story of the dramatic appropriation of native voices, meanings, and histories by colonial forms and logics of knowledge. Even Mackenzie's impressive reticence to gloss and catalog his own collection became the pretext for the marginalization of the native scholars Mackenzie had himself seen as so instrumental in his project. Natives could only be informants; native knowledge only the stuff of anthropological curiosity. In the late nineteenth century, when Mackenzie's collection was referred to at all it was as a reference for the origin stories of local castes in the proliferation of manuals and gazetteers produced by District level administrators. Fragments of Mackenzie's obsessive but uncritical collection were salvaged by a colonial science that gave new order to the decadent profusion of texts and histories of early colonial encounter.

Walter Benjamin wrote that "Every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector's passion borders on the chaos of memories."⁴⁹ For Mackenzie, steeped in Enlightenment convictions about truth rather than modernist concerns about experience, the chaos was rooted in the unknown rather than the unremembered. But because Mackenzie's unknown kept obscuring what he did know, about the character of collection and the struggles of history, we know far less about the practices of Mackenzie's archive than we might like. Again to quote Benjamin, "For what else is this collection but a disorder to which habit has accommodated itself to such an extent that it can appear as order."⁵⁰ With Mackenzie's silence, there was nothing but disorder.

As colonial rule in India became more secure, and the histories of conquest were rewritten as epics of imperial entitlement, Mackenzie's silence dissolved into the silencing of India, the suppression both of the history and the historicity of India. Said's story can now be told, that of a colonialist mythic discourse untroubled either by other voices or any awareness of its own genealogy of historical process and struggle, of its own violence and violation.

Notes

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2. Said quotes the passage from Malek in his *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 97. See Anwar Abdel Malek, "Orientalism in Crisis," *Diogenes* 44 (Winter 1963): 107–8.

3. Said, *Orientalism*, 321. For a critical appreciation of Said, see my introduction to Nicholas B. Dirks, ed., *Colonialism and Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992).

4. Montstuart Elphinstone, *The History of India: The Hindu and Mahometan Periods* (London: J. Murray, 1841). Mill's eight-volume history of India seemed to have been the last word on the subject, and Elphinstone clearly felt the need to apologize for his own work so soon after Mill's. Mill had, as Elphinstone pointed out, never been in India. See James Mill, *The History of British India* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1820; repr. New York: Chelsea House, 1968).

5. For further musings on Mackenzie, see my "Glorious Spoiliations: Picturesque Beauty, Colonial Knowledge, and Colin Mackenzie's Survey of India," in Catherine Asher and Thomas Metcalf, eds., *Perceptions of India's Visual Past*, forthcoming.

6. Excerpted in William Taylor, *Catalogue Raisonné of Oriental Manuscripts in the Library of the (Late) College of Fort Saint George* (Madras, 1857), ii, iii.

7. "Biographical Sketch of the Literary Career of the Late Colin Mackenzie, Surveyor-General of India; comprising some particulars of his collection of manuscripts, plans, coins, drawings, sculptures, etc., illustrative of the antiquities, history, geography, laws, institutions, and manners of the ancient Hindus; contained in a letter addressed by him to the Right Hon. Sir Alexander Johnston, V.P.R.A.S., etc. etc.," *Madras Journal of Science and Literature* (1835).

8. W. C. Mackenzie, *Colonel Colin Mackenzie: First Surveyor-General of India* (Edinburgh and London: W & R Chambers Ltd., 1952), 53.

9. Colonel R. H. Phillimore, *The Historical Records of the Survey of India* (Dehra Dun, 1945), I, 331.

10. Survey of India Records (SIR), National Archives of India (NAI), vol. 68.
13. SIR, vol. 68, letter dated November 13, 1803.
14. SIR, vol. 41, letter dated November 9, 1799.
15. SIR, vol. 41, letter dated January 10, 1803.
16. SIR, vol. 41, letter dated January 11, 1816.
17. SIR, vol. 41, letter from Mackenzie to Mysore Resident, dated November 24, 1800.
18. SIR (Misc), letter from Mackenzie to Elphinstone, September 7, 1818.
19. Phillimore, *Historical Records* II, 367.
20. Home Miscellaneous, IOR, vol. 256, extract of Bengal Public Consultation, 14 March 1800, letter February 24, to Governor-General.
21. SIR, vol. 41, letter from Mackenzie to Colonel Montresor, dated July 28, 1800.
22. SIR, vol. 42, letter dated Madras July 12, 1803.
23. Foreign Miscellaneous, NAI, vol. 92, 180.
24. *Ibid.*, 247.
25. SIR, vol. 42, Second Report on the Mysore Survey, Letter from Mackenzie to Close, July 12, 1803.
26. "Memorandum of the Means of procuring historical materials regarding the south of India," doc. no. 65, Box 3, Mackenzie uncataloged miscellaneous papers, IOL.
27. SIR, vol. 42, 1816.
28. Foreign Miscellaneous Series, NAI, vol. 94.
29. SIR, Report on Mysore Survey, July 1803.
30. *Ibid.*
31. SIR, vol. 41, letter to Mackenzie dated June 25, 1803.
32. SIR, Letter to Gov't, Madras, July 29, 1808.
33. Mackenzie, *Colonel Colin Mackenzie*, 274, 275.
34. SIR, vol. 41, letter to Close, dt. May 29, 1801.
35. SIR, vol. 156.
36. The subsequent quotes and references are to the Mackenzie Collection, Unbound translations, Class XII, housed in the India Office Library, London. The volume and book numbers are idiosyncratic and sometimes contradictory. For the only index to this collection, see the appendix to H. H. Wilson, *Catalogue of Oriental Mss. of Col. Mackenzie* (Calcutta: 1828).
37. Mackenzie General Collection, IOL, vol. 2.
38. Board's Collection, IOL, no. 6426.
39. Ft. St. George Public Consultation, August 16, 1808.
40. Mackenzie, *Colonel Colin Mackenzie*, 366.
41. Board's Collection, IOL, no. 6426, letter dated March 14, 1807.
42. Mackenzie, *Colonel Colin Mackenzie*, 122.
43. C. O. Blagden, *Catalogue of Manuscripts in European Languages Belonging to the Library of the India Office* (London: Oxford University Press, 1916).
44. *Ibid.*, p. 358.

45. Taylor, *Catalogue* (note 6), ix, x.

46. See my "Castes of Mind," *Representations* (Winter 1993).

47. *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (October 1839), 44.

49. Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking my Library," in *Illuminations* (New York: 1969), 60.

50. *Ibid.*