



Exploring Contribution Of Alexander Cunningham In The Field Of Archaeology: An Informative Study

Smita Debnath

Research Scholar

Department of History,

Assam University, Silchar, Assam, India

Abstract: In the subject of archaeology, especially in South Asia, Sir Alexander Cunningham (1814–1893) is considered a trailblazer by many. The foundation for the methodical investigation and conservation of old Indian legacy was established by his services. After being appointed as the first Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in 1861 and serving in that capacity until 1865, Cunningham's extensive career began. Under his direction, the ASI began systematically exploring and cataloguing India's archeological sites, laying the groundwork for an exacting standard of archaeological practice. By using exacting survey methods and creating an organized monument inventory, Cunningham's methodology helped discover and categorize a large number of sites and objects.

His work was essential in locating and interpreting important Buddhist sites, such as the well-known Sarnath and Bodh Gaya, which are essential to comprehending the historical progression of Buddhism. Apart from his fieldwork, Cunningham made major contributions to the academic debate on South Asian archaeology through his scholarly publications, such as "The Ancient Geography of India" and other studies. He also pushed for the conservation of heritage places long before contemporary conservation procedures were formalized, which has contributed to their preservation and protection. This is an instructive study with an exploratory research approach. The current study examines Cunningham's contributions to the discipline of archaeology. Finally, the conclusion of this study enhance our knowledge of Cunningham's methodologies and provide valuable insights into the understanding the contribution in the field of archaeology.

Keywords - Alexander Cunningham, Archaeology, Methodology, Contribution

1. Research Objective: To explore the contribution of Alexander Cunningham in the field of archaeology.

2. Research Methodology: This study is based on secondary data collected from both print and online journals and other relevant sources. This brief study is exploratory and informative in nature. These secondary data were analysed through external and internal criticism.

3. Introduction: Cunningham's spirit of pioneering and his meticulous approach to archaeology not only broadened the field's bounds but also established a standard for subsequent archaeological projects on the Indian subcontinent. The rich historical and cultural terrain of South Asia is still being explored and appreciated, so his legacy lives on. In this informative study major contribution of Cunningham in the field of archaeology are pioneering archaeological surveys, Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), excavations and discoveries, study of Indian Numismatics and theoretical contributions were discussed.

4. Contribution of Cunningham in the field of archaeology: Sir Alexander Cunningham (1814–1893) made significant contributions to the field of archaeology, particularly in India. Here are some key aspects of his work:

1. Pioneering Archaeological Surveys: As one of the pioneers of Indian archaeology, Cunningham carried out some of the first systematic surveys of ancient sites in the country, laying the foundation for later archaeological research and exploration in the area. Without a doubt, Sir Alexander Cunningham's groundbreaking archaeological surveys in India were revolutionary and had a significant influence on the field. The following are more specific details of his contributions to these surveys:

A-Systematic Approach to Surveying:

Initial Explorations: Before the Archaeological Survey of India was founded, Cunningham started conducting archaeological research in India in the early 1800s. Based on accounts from local sources and historical writings, he first investigated and recorded a number of ancient places.

Comprehensive Surveys: Cunningham conducted in-depth studies of many areas of northern India in the 1850s and 1860s, including the Ganges Basin, the areas surrounding Delhi, and portions of the Deccan. His surveys were some of the first to map and document ancient sites in a systematic manner.

Methodical Documentation: Cunningham used a deliberate approach. He diligently documented all he observed, including the sites' physical attributes, architectural elements, inscriptions, and artifacts. This meticulous attention to detail laid the groundwork for comprehending the sites' historical and cultural context.

B- Key Discoveries and Contributions

Sanchi Stupa: Cunningham started exploring the Sanchi site in 1851, and it was one of his great findings. Cunningham's work led to the unveiling of the Sanchi Stupa, a prominent Buddhist monument. This included the finding of its well-preserved gateways, or toranas, which were decorated with elaborate carvings that represented various parts of Buddhist stories and teachings.

Sarnath: Cunningham's investigation of Sarnath, the location of the Buddha's alleged first sermon, was another noteworthy accomplishment. During his excavations, he discovered significant Buddhist artifacts, including as the well-known Ashoka Pillar, which is vital to understanding how Buddhism spread.

Bhagavata Purana Inscription: Inscriptions and sculptures that offered important insights into the historical and cultural contexts of ancient India were also discovered as a result of Cunningham's work at numerous sites. For example, his study aided in the interpretation and interpretation of the meaning of the inscriptions at these locations.

C- Institutional and Methodological Impact

Establishment of ASI: Cunningham's methodical approach and the findings of his surveys proved that an official body devoted to the study and conservation of archaeology was necessary. As a result, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) was founded in 1861, and Cunningham was appointed as the organization's first Director General.

Influence on Future Archaeology: Future archaeological research in India will follow the example set by Cunningham's surveys. His focus on stratigraphy, documentation, and preservation set norms for archaeological study and inspired archaeologists in the generations that followed.

Publications: Cunningham's research was published in the "Archaeological Survey of India Reports," which had a significant impact on the information that was shared about ancient Indian sites and artifacts. His surveys and excavations were described in depth in these publications, which made a substantial contribution to the subject of Indian archaeology.

2. Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI): In 1861, Cunningham was named the ASI's first director general, a post he kept until 1865. The ASI started methodically documenting and preserving India's historic monuments and archeological sites under his direction. An influential time in the development of Indian archaeology occurred during Sir Alexander Cunningham's term as the organization's first Director General (ASI). The following are specifics of his leadership style and the effect he had on the ASI:

A-Foundational Role in ASI:

Establishment of the ASI: Cunningham and other supporters of preserving India's cultural legacy played a major role in the British government's decision to create the Archaeological Survey of India in 1861. Cunningham assumed the position of the organization's first Director General, a crucial position in determining the organization's first goals and course.

Organizational Structure: With the specific goal of methodically surveying, recording, and safeguarding India's historic monuments and places, Cunningham established the ASI. This involved creating procedures for cataloging and preserving archaeological artifacts and setting up a structure for the ASI's activities.

B-Survey and Documentation:

Systematic Surveys: Cunningham led the ASI in conducting extensive surveys throughout India. Several of these surveys, which surveyed the Deccan Plateau, the central and northern regions of India, and the Ganges

Valley, were led by Cunningham himself. His surveys sought to locate and catalog historic sites, including as fortresses, stupas, and temples.

Standardization of Methods: Cunningham developed organized techniques for recording archaeological sites. This comprised precise measurements, illustrations, and field notes. His methodology guaranteed the accuracy of the data gathered, making them suitable for scholarly comparison and analysis.

Site Preservation: Cunningham emphasized the importance of preserving ancient monuments. His work included efforts to protect and maintain sites that were at risk of deterioration. This laid the groundwork for the conservation practices that would become integral to the ASI's work.

C-Publications and Reports

Archaeological Survey of India Reports: Cunningham launched the "Archaeological Survey of India Reports," which grew to be a vital channel for sharing knowledge about study and discoveries in the field of archaeology. These studies featured thorough site descriptions, research results, and Cunningham's analysis of the sites' historical significance.

Inclusion of Illustrations: Plans and pictures of locations and artifacts were frequently included in the reports, which was helpful for both academics and the general public. The written descriptions were enhanced by these visual records, which also made it easier to comprehend the discoveries' physical context.

D-Impact and Legacy

Institutional Foundation: Under Cunningham's direction, the ASI became an official, professional organization in India devoted to the preservation of cultural heritage and archaeology. His work established guidelines for the documentation and conduct of archaeological investigation.

Influence on Future Research: Cunningham's methods and techniques had an impact on archaeologists in later generations. His focus on methodical recording and preservation became cornerstones of the archaeology community.

Cultural Awareness: Cunningham's initiatives raised awareness of India's rich past and culture. He made it possible for future generations to acknowledge and study India's ancient heritage by recording and safeguarding monuments and artifacts.

Challenges and Controversies: Cunningham faced difficulties during his career, despite the fact that his achievements were substantial. There were discussions concerning the interpretation of certain archaeological findings and sporadic critiques of the ASI's operations and management. These difficulties, meanwhile, were a result of the field's ongoing evolution.

3. Excavations and Discoveries: Cunningham's fieldwork produced numerous significant sites that were found and excavated. Among these were the historic sites of Sanchi, well-known for its historic gateways and stupas, and the ancient city of Sarnath, where he discovered the remains of a Buddhist monastery and stupa. India's ancient legacy was made public thanks in large part to the excavations and findings conducted by Sir Alexander Cunningham. Here are some in-depth explanations of some of his most significant archeological accomplishments:

A-Sarnath:

Historical Significance: Sarnath is one of the most significant Buddhist shrines and is situated in Uttar Pradesh, close to Varanasi. It is said to have been the site of Gautama Buddha's first sermon following his enlightenment. It is therefore an essential location for comprehending early Buddhism.

Discovery and Excavation: Cunningham started investigating Sarnath in 1835 and carried out a large-scale excavation in the 1850s. Several significant buildings were discovered as a result of his studies at Sarnath:

- **The Dhamek Stupa:** This massive stupa, dating back to the 5th century CE, was one of Cunningham's notable discoveries. It is believed to have been built to commemorate Buddha's first sermon.
- **The Ashoka Pillar:** Cunningham uncovered the famous Ashoka Pillar, which features a lion capital and inscriptions by Emperor Ashoka, an influential Mauryan ruler who promoted Buddhism. The pillar provided crucial evidence of Ashoka's reign and his support for Buddhism.
- **The Remains of Monastic Complexes:** Cunningham also unearthed the remains of ancient monasteries and other religious structures, which helped in reconstructing the layout and significance of the site.
- **Documentation:** Cunningham meticulously documented his findings, providing detailed descriptions and illustrations. His work included detailed sketches of the stupa and the Ashoka Pillar, which were published in the "Archæological Survey of India Reports."

B-Sanchi

1. **Historical Context:** Sanchi, located in Madhya Pradesh, is renowned for its stupas, monastic complexes, and intricately carved gateways. The site is a significant example of early Buddhist art and architecture.
2. **Exploration and Excavation:** Cunningham began his work at Sanchi in 1851, and his excavations revealed several key features:
 - **The Great Stupa:** This is the most famous structure at Sanchi, built originally by Emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century BCE. Cunningham's work led to the restoration and documentation of its elaborate architecture and sculptural decoration.
 - **Toranas (Gateways):** Cunningham uncovered and documented the four magnificent toranas (gateways) of the Great Stupa. These gateways are adorned with detailed reliefs depicting scenes from the life of the Buddha and Jataka tales (stories of Buddha's previous lives). They are significant for understanding Buddhist iconography and art.
 - **Monastic Buildings:** Cunningham's excavations also revealed the remains of monastic buildings, including vihara (monastic cells) and chaityas (prayer halls), providing insight into the Buddhist monastic life of the period.

3. **Impact and Preservation:** Cunningham's documentation and restoration efforts at Sanchi were among the first comprehensive attempts to preserve and study Buddhist architecture in India. His work contributed significantly to the understanding of early Buddhist art and architecture.

C-Additional Discoveries

1. **Bhagavata Purana Inscription:** Cunningham discovered and studied inscriptions at various sites, including those related to the Bhagavata Purana. These inscriptions provided valuable information about religious and historical contexts.
2. **Other Sites:** Cunningham conducted surveys and excavations at other notable sites, such as the ancient city of Taxila (in modern-day Pakistan), which was an important center of learning and culture in ancient India. His work at Taxila included the discovery of several significant ruins and artifacts.

D-Legacy

Cunningham's excavations were pioneering in their systematic approach and scholarly rigor. His work not only uncovered significant historical and religious sites but also set standards for archaeological practice in India. His detailed documentation provided a valuable foundation for future research and preservation efforts in Indian archaeology.

4. Documentation and Publication: Cunningham made significant contributions to the field of Indian history and archaeology by his thorough recording and publishing of his research. His studies, which were published in the "Archaeological Survey of India Reports," among other places, included thorough explanations and evaluations of the locations and items he examined. Cunningham made a substantial contribution to Indian history and archaeology, especially with his meticulous record-keeping and publishing work. The following information relates to his work:

Archaeological Survey of India Reports: In this series, Cunningham's reports laid the groundwork. His painstaking work, which combined in-depth investigations of the objects with comprehensive descriptions of the sites, set a high standard for archaeological reporting. These papers provided insights into the historical and cultural value of the places in addition to documenting their physical features.

Methodology: Cunningham used a methodical and exacting approach to documenting. He painstakingly documented the location, size, and state of objects and archaeological sites. His reports were accompanied by thorough drawings and plans that helped to better understand the sites and gave his findings a visual perspective.

Publication: Cunningham produced more writings than just the official reports. His work was made available to the academic community and the general public in a variety of formats, such as books and journal articles. These writings impacted Indian archaeology and assisted in the broad dissemination of his discoveries.

Influence on Indian Archaeology: Cunningham made substantial contributions to the field of Indian archaeology with his in-depth studies and analysis. Future archaeologists embraced the methodological

framework he built through his work. He was instrumental in the discovery and preservation of significant historical sites, many of which were previously unidentified or little understood.

Legacy: The way that Indian archaeological methods have developed is clear evidence of Cunningham's influence. His emphasis on thorough recording and publication set the foundation for later archaeological research, and his contributions are still acknowledged and cited in the field.

5-Study of Indian Numismatics: In addition, Cunningham was a trailblazer in the field of Indian coin studies. His research on Indian numismatics made it easier to comprehend ancient India's chronological and economic history. Cunningham substantially advanced our understanding of Indian currency through his important contributions to the field of Indian numismatics. The following are specifics of his work in this field:

Pioneering Work: Cunningham is frequently acknowledged as a trailblazer in the domain of Indian numismatics. His methodical approach to coin analysis laid the foundation for the academic study of Indian coinage. He was one of the first to regard coins as priceless historical relics that might shed light on the political and economic background of ancient India.

Coin Classification and Cataloging: Cunningham cataloged and classified a large variety of Indian coins with great care. He was responsible for classifying coins according to types, issuers, and historical eras. This coding scheme was essential to comprehending the development of coinage as well as the historical order of different emperors and dynasties.

Economic History: Cunningham made a substantial contribution to our understanding of India's economic history through his studies of numismatics. Coins can provide important insights into commerce, the state of the economy, and the scope of political power. Cunningham shed light on trade routes, economic interactions, and the relative affluence of various places through his study of currency patterns.

Chronology: Cunningham's coin research contributed to the development of an accurate chronological framework for Indian history. For historians and archaeologists studying ancient Indian history, he produced a chronological timeline by dating coins and connecting them to historical occurrences and emperors.

Publications: Cunningham published his research on Indian numismatics in a number of articles and reports. The "Archaeological Survey of India Reports" and other academic magazines published his work. In addition to disseminating his research findings, these papers provided other academics with methodology ideas.

Influence on Subsequent Research: Later academics and numismatists were impacted by Cunningham's groundbreaking work in numismatics. His methods and observations laid the groundwork for further research and made Indian numismatics a reputable topic of study.

Contributions to Understanding Rulers and Dynasties: Cunningham illuminated the emperors and dynasties that minted the coins by deciphering their inscriptions, images, and motifs. Understanding the political climate of ancient India, including the emergence and dissolution of different powers, required knowledge of this.

6. Theoretical Contributions: Cunningham took a rigorous and evidence-based approach to archaeology. He established guidelines for future archaeological work by highlighting the significance of stratigraphy and meticulous documentation of finds. Cunningham made theoretical contributions to archaeology that have

influenced contemporary methods and conventions. His rigorous, evidence-based approach introduced several important principles that made a substantial contribution to the profession.

Methodical Approach: Cunningham promoted an ordered and methodical approach to archaeology. He underlined how crucial it is to record findings precisely and with great care. This meticulous process guaranteed the validity of archaeological material and its applicability in precisely reconstructing historical situations.

Stratigraphy: Cunningham's concentration on stratigraphy—the study of rock layers (strata) and layering—was one of his major contributions. He realized that important information about the chronological evolution of archeological sites could be gleaned from the stratum succession. Cunningham contributed to the development of a technique for dating artifacts and comprehending the chronology of historical events by realizing the significance of stratigraphic layers.

Careful Recording: Cunningham established guidelines requiring meticulous documentation of archeological discoveries. For a proper interpretation, he felt that every aspect mattered, from the location and context of the objects to their condition and affiliations with one another. This focus on thorough recording developed into a pillar of archaeological practice and is crucial in contemporary archaeology.

Contextual Analysis: Cunningham's method made clear how crucial context is to understanding archaeology. He emphasized that objects have to be examined in the context of their discovery rather than being researched in isolation. This context encompasses the arrangement of objects in space, their placement within the stratigraphic column, and their correlation with other discoveries. Comprehending the context aids archaeologists in reconstructing historical changes and past human activities.

Evidence-Based Interpretation: Cunningham's dedication to interpreting the data based on evidence raised the bar for archaeological study. Rather than relying on conjecture or unproven beliefs, he made use of methodical observations and tangible proof. This meticulous methodology made sure that inferences made from his study were supported by concrete data.

Publication Standards: Cunningham's dedication to meticulous documentation and analysis was evident in his studies and publications. His thorough explanations and drawings of archaeological sites and artifacts served as a template for how research results need to be communicated to the academic community.

Influence on Future Archaeologists: Cunningham made significant theoretical contributions that influenced the advancement of archaeological methods. His focus on context, stratigraphy, and thorough documentation affected later archaeologists and contributed to the development of contemporary archaeological techniques.

Ethical Considerations: Cunningham's method subtly supported the preservation of archeological sites and artifacts even though it was not stated in the framework of contemporary ethical principles. He made a significant contribution to the moral management of cultural heritage by emphasizing meticulous documentation and analysis.

5. Conclusion:

Cunningham's ground breaking archaeological surveys played a critical role in identifying and preserving India's ancient past. His methodical approach and important discoveries laid the groundwork for further archaeological research and created fundamental ideas that still serve as a guide for the discipline today. In

conclusion, Cunningham's function as the ASI's first Director General was essential in creating the policies and procedures that govern archaeological study and heritage conservation in India. His visionary leadership and innovative work shaped the ASI's long-term goals and left a long-lasting impression on the archaeological community. Cunningham's excavations and discoveries at sites like Sarnath and Sanchi were pivotal in revealing India's rich Buddhist heritage. His meticulous work contributed greatly to the field of archaeology and provided lasting insights into ancient Indian culture and history. Overall, Cunningham's meticulous documentation and publication efforts were crucial in advancing the study of Indian history and archaeology, providing a detailed and systematic record of India's rich cultural heritage. Cunningham's work in Indian numismatics was ground breaking and had a lasting impact on the field. His systematic approach to studying and documenting coins helped provide a clearer picture of India's economic and political history, and his contributions continue to be valued in the study of Indian coinage. Cunningham's theoretical contributions to archaeology were crucial in establishing the methodologies and standards that underpin the field today. His emphasis on methodical, evidence-based practices, and detailed recording set a precedent for future archaeological work, ensuring that findings are reliable, interpretable, and contextually grounded. Overall, Cunningham's contributions were instrumental in establishing archaeology as a rigorous scientific discipline in India and in uncovering the rich historical and cultural heritage of the region.

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