Methods and Problems in the Site Census Approach: A View from Mewar through Archaeology and Ethnohistory

Namita Sugandhi¹, Teresa P. Raczek², Prabodh Shirvalkar³, Charles K. Brummeler² and Lalit Pandey⁴

¹. Hartwick College, One Hartwick Drive, Oneonta, NY 13820, USA (Email: namitasugandhi@gmail.com)
². Kennesaw State University, 402 Bartow Ave, Kennesaw, GA 30144, USA (Email: tpraczek@gmail.com; brummelerc@gmail.com)
³. Deccan College Post-graduate and Research Institute, Yerwada, Pune –411006, Maharashtra, India (Email: prabodh.s@gmail.com)
⁴. J.R.N. Rajasthan Vidyapeeth University, Pratap Nagar, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India (Email: pandey_lalit2003@yahoo.com)

Abstract: The practice of conducting a regional census has some similarities but many differences from systematic archaeological survey. Both attempt to study “sites”, or material traces of human activities in the past, but the idea of an archaeological “census” utilizes a more informal approach to visiting sites that have been previously documented by earlier researchers. Archaeological census has the goal of assessing site destruction, degradation, and various issues associated with heritage management. The method can provide valuable data about the current status of sites and serve as an expedient tool for future research planning as well as in the development of community and cultural resource management strategies. In this paper, we present census details from a multi-year project conducted in the Mewar Plain of Rajasthan, outlining our methods and the various conditions that shaped our approach and results, emphasizing in particular the role of ethnohistory.

Keywords: Archaeological Census, Archaeological Survey, Oral History, Rajasthan Archaeology, Mewar, Ahar-Banas, Gilund

Introduction
Field survey in its various forms has been an important research tool since the beginnings of the discipline of archaeology. The very title of the “Archaeological Survey of India” (ASI) demonstrates the place of priority that survey has held throughout the history of Indian archaeology. Initiated in 1862 by Alexander Cunningham as a temporary project with the goal of describing and documenting all archaeological remains encountered over two seasons of research(Cunningham 1972), the work remains ongoing today(Sengupta and Lambah 2012), despite the belief at
Cunningham’s retirement in 1885 that the ASI’s work would be done in 5 years (Marshall 1903: 3). The ASI built on survey work of early researchers like Colin Mackenzie and Francis Buchanan who mapped and documented sites and monuments for the British East India Company in order to examine “unknown territory,” Aurel Stein who undertook surveys as part of the “Great Game”(Chakrabarti 1981; Edney 1990; Ghosh 1953; Robb 1998; Roy 1961; Stein 1905, 1929), and Luigi P. Tessitori who identified the significance of Kalibangan(Tessitori 1917-18, 1918-19). Since that time, survey has continued to be an important research method for identifying sites and understanding ancient regional landscapes. Since the early years however, a number of variations of this technique have developed. Random exploration gave way to village-to-village survey, systematic survey, and site catchment analysis. Archaeologists who focus on excavation also implement informal local surveys in the form of site visits to check on sites that have been previously documented. We refer to this practice as a “site census,” and argue that, like more formally developed survey methods, site censuses provide a valuable way of assessing and analyzing the archaeological record. Today, site census has become relevant in part due to increasing population and development, which has led to villagers encroaching upon previously identified sites. Thus, site census is an important element of salvage archaeology and has become an urgent need.

In its most basic form, a census is an enumeration and collection of demographic data. An archaeological site census includes the counting of sites and the assessment of their condition. As a method, the site census has some similarities but many differences from other forms of archaeological survey. All attempts to locate “sites,” or material traces of human activities in the past, but a survey typically emphasizes discovery of new sites while census assesses the status of those that have been previously documented. Surveys locate and record sites of archaeological importance, and fashion that data into a form of knowledge useful for individual, regional or comparative social, political, and economic analyses of past society. Systematic archaeological survey can be exhausting, grueling and take an unforeseeable number of years to complete, but is a valuable tool for understanding not just where sites are located but also significant patterns of settlement, development and exchange that occurred over time.

In contrast, the idea of an archaeological “census” suggests a more expedient and informal approach to revisiting and documenting sites. Archaeological censuses have the goal of assessing site destruction, degradation, and various issues associated with heritage management. They can also be used to re-examine archaeological assessments that were based on previous research or earlier paradigms, particularly at sites documented decades ago when archaeological techniques and theoretical frameworks may have been different from those used today. Archaeological census can provide valuable data about the current status of sites and serve as an expedient tool for future research planning as well as the development of community and cultural resource management strategies. The contingent and informal nature of site census also highlights the highly subjective nature of archaeological investigation in general, an
important consideration in all archaeological research. In this paper, we present results from a small census project conducted in the Mewar Plain of southeastern Rajasthan over the course of multiple field seasons from 2009 through 2015, outlining our methods and the various conditions that shaped our approach and results.

The Mewar Plain Archaeological Assessment (MPAA)
Archaeological research has documented a long sequence of occupation in Mewar, beginning with the Paleolithic era and continuing up until the present day (Misra 2007). By the 4th millennium BC the region was inhabited by sedentary agriculturalists as well as semi-nomadic pastoral groups (Raczek 2016; Shinde and Sarkar 2014). Archaeological excavation at the settlement sites of Ahar, Balathal, Chatrikhera, Gilund, Ojiyana, Panchmata, and PuraniMarmihave documented evidence for a regional Chalcolithic tradition distinct from other Copper and Bronze Age societies in the surrounding regions such as the Ganeshwar-Jodhpura Complex to the northeast, and the urbanized Indus civilization to the northwest (Meena and Tripathi 2001, 2001-2002; Mishra 2003; Misra 1997; Misra, et al. 1995; Mohanty, et al. 2000; Raczek and Shinde 2010; Raczek, et al. 2015; Sankalia, et al. 1969; Shinde, et al. 2014; Sugandhi, et al. 2010). Research at the site of Bagor, often interpreted as a pastoral camp, revealed evidence for an occupation that was contemporaneous with the early farming communities of the Ahar tradition (Misra 1973). Comparison between the lithic assemblages recovered from Bagor and Gilund has identified significant overlap in technological knowledge, suggesting important connections between the sedentary and mobile groups inhabiting Mewar during the Chalcolithic period (and see Possehl and Kennedy 1979; Raczek 2011).

Between 2009 and 2015, the Mewar Plain Archaeological Assessment has conducted work to explore the archaeological sequence of pre-, proto-, and early historic Mewar while also investigating issues of community history and site preservation (Raczek, et al. 2015). Three sites were excavated as part of the MPAA: Chatrikhera, Jawasiya-Arni and Panchmata. Oral histories collected from local residents demonstrated varying narratives tied to both village history and other aspects of identity (Raczek, et al. 2011). In addition to its archaeological goals, the MPAA was also designed to assess the level of site destruction at many archaeological sites in the vicinity. To this end, team members conducted interviews with residents at Chatrikhera, Jawasiya-Arni and Panchmata about their plans for the archaeological remains in and around their villages, and documented artifact reclamation and re-use (Raczek and Sugandhi 2010; Sugandhi, et al. 2010). The team also conducted a small scale archaeological census through a judgment sampling strategy that targeted sites in between the major settlements of Ahar and Gilund. It is this latter portion of the project that we outline here.

Terminology and Methodology
Before proceeding, it is important to clearly define what we mean by the terms “village
to village survey,” “systematic archaeological survey,” “site catchment analysis,” and “archaeological census.” As mentioned above, the idea of “survey” indicates the search for new or undocumented archaeological sites through a variety of means. “Village to village survey” relies far more on the knowledge of local inhabitants and historical geography, and is often conducted under the assumption that earlier occupations were established at or near modern settlements. Village to village survey consists of travelling between villages and asking the village residents about the location of archaeological sites. It relies on local knowledge of the landscape and saves researchers time that might be wasted walking for kilometers without finding sites. However, this method is limited to those sites that are located close to currently occupied villages, and thus there is a location bias inherent in the findings. The method is also limited by the ability of local residents to identify certain sites as “archaeological.” For example, sites that consist primarily of lithics are often not recognized by villagers, nor are artifact scatters that are not thought by villagers to be “old.”

Many of these limitations were corrected by the development of systematic site survey. “Systematic archaeological survey” generally implies the majority of data is being collected by archaeologists using scientific procedures and rigorous documentation methods to either sample or fully cover a clearly delimited survey area. This method employs a much more rigorous approach to seek out and document “new” sites though basic pedestrian survey implemented by walking transects at set distances and ground-truthing all corners of a map. This method increasingly uses advanced techniques of remote sensing such as satellite imaging and LIDAR. Systematic survey has the advantages of offering complete coverage of a map, reducing data biases introduced by the location of roads and the existence of local knowledge. However, it is extremely time consuming and requires a large percentage of time to be devoted to confirming that no sites exist in various parts of a region.

The third method, site catchment analysis, was developed as part of the Processual approach to archaeology (Flannery 1976; Roper 1979; Vita-Finzi and Higgs 1970) in order to identify the nearby resources available to a given site. The method centers the site of interest in the center of the map and then explores widening concentric circles in search of other sites, raw material resources, water resources, and land quality. The goal is to identify which resources are available to site inhabitants within a day’s walk. The assumption is that any resources not immediately available must be brought into the site through trade and exchange or through logistical mobility. This method has been implemented in a number of places in India with great success (Dasgupta Ghosh 2014; Dibyopama 2006; Pappu 1988).

The “archaeological census” has much in common with the above methods except that rather than concerning itself with the discovery of new sites, the census seeks out previously documented sites with the goal of assessing their current state. Such studies may be conducted for a number of reasons including initial exploratory work by a team that did not conduct the initial survey as a way to plan more intensive
research efforts, training students to recognize the types of sites and material culture local to a specific region, documenting site destruction, and correcting flaws in earlier data, particularly geographic coordinates which may be more precisely recorded with modern GPS technology. The methodology of site census includes visiting sites, checking longitude and latitude with GPS, talking to local residents, and taking notes and photos. No artifacts are collected. While the non-systematic and sometimes arbitrary nature of an archaeological census does not provide the same resolution of quantitative data as survey, the relatively expedient nature of this practice makes it a useful strategy in particular situations when relatively rapid recording strategies are necessary – a condition seen all too frequently in today’s world of expansive development and shrinking resources for academic research.

Several regional surveys and archaeological reports have been published for Mewar, particularly those focusing on Ahar period sites. Two of these surveys consisted of the village to village method used in a well-defined area (Hooja 1988; Indian Archaeology 1956-57, 1957-58, 1958-59, 1959-60, 1960-61, 1961-2, 1962-63, 1979-80, 1982-83, 1984-85; Misra 1967), while two consisted of site catchment analyses centered on the sites of Gilund (Dasgupta Ghosh 2014) and Balathal (Dibyopama 2006). A comprehensive gazetteer has also been published by Misra (Misra 2007). These works formed the basis for our own site census, which involved examining several of the sites documented in these works while we were conducting work on the MPAA. A total of 21 sites were revisited (Fig. 1 & Table 1) over multiple seasons in order to document the current status of preservation.

Figure 1: Map of sites visited
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Name</th>
<th>GPS Coordinates</th>
<th>State of Preservation</th>
<th>Notes from Oral Histories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bamanhera</td>
<td>24° 58’ 43.1” N 73° 53’ 1.2” E</td>
<td>Slightly disturbed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devri Doonka (Uthnol)</td>
<td>24° 54’ 2.5” N 73° 52’ 47.4” E</td>
<td>Moderate to severe</td>
<td>Previously named Haniand was destroyed by an earthquake. Coins allegedly found by the villagers. Statues (Murti) worshipped on nearby hill, but had been moved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fachar</td>
<td>24° 38’12.9” N 73° 58’13.4” E</td>
<td>Completely destroyed</td>
<td>20 years ago, workers found pottery while building houses, but they threw it out. Village is thought to be 400 years old, founded by 3 families of Brahmins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gogathala</td>
<td>25° 04’ 11.0” N 74° 3’ 45.8” E</td>
<td>Slightly disturbed</td>
<td>Believed to be an ancient town called Patten.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hingwanio</td>
<td>24° 46’26.8” N 74° 16’29.3” E</td>
<td>Highly disturbed and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>construction on mound</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hironji-ka-Khera</td>
<td>24° 44’3.8” N 74° 17’26.9” E</td>
<td>Mostly intact, some</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>plowing on surface</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joera</td>
<td>24° 44’ 19.2” N 74° 7’ 14.7” E</td>
<td>Moderately disturbed</td>
<td>Current village is about 100 years old. Gadri community had lived there before and still live in the area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juni Kochli</td>
<td>24° 57’ 49.2” N 73° 53’ 29.4” E</td>
<td>Slightly disturbed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karanpur</td>
<td>24° 39’ 00.0”N 73° 57’33.9” E</td>
<td>Unknown; site could not</td>
<td>Old village reported to be about 10 km SW of current village. It had a mustard seed oil mill. The old village is thought to be 500 years old, established by a king called Pandan, and the current village 200 years old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>be located</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kheri</td>
<td>24° 38’ 32.3” N 73° 55’ 5.2” E</td>
<td>Moderately disturbed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kotharia</td>
<td>24° 57’ 00.0” N 73° 52’ 00.0” E</td>
<td>Completely destroyed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Coordinates</td>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maharaj Ki Khedi</td>
<td>24°38’0.1” N 73°55’36.4” E</td>
<td>Completely destroyed</td>
<td>Locals had no knowledge of site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mangas</td>
<td>25°04’00.0” N 74°13’00.0” E</td>
<td>Unknown, presumed gone</td>
<td>Locals had previously found eroded pots and discarded them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meroli</td>
<td>25°5’6.4”N 74°24’12.9” E</td>
<td>Moderately disturbed</td>
<td>Locals had previously found eroded pots and discarded them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purani Marmi</td>
<td>25°6’36.6” N 74°25’52.6” E</td>
<td>Severely disturbed; only a small portion remains</td>
<td>Only a few locals remembered that the site existed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rashmi</td>
<td>25°3’39.4”N 74°21’47.7” E</td>
<td>Severely disturbed</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rawalia</td>
<td>24°43’4.4” N 74°38’25.6” E</td>
<td>Slightly disturbed; nearby construction threatens the site</td>
<td>Site is called Raogarh, and is thought to have been destroyed in an earthquake ~1000 years ago.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarawat</td>
<td>24°41’56.9” N 74°2’42.0” E</td>
<td>Highly disturbed, excavation of mound and construction on top of mound</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umand</td>
<td>24°46’31.7” N 74°19’9.5” E</td>
<td>Mostly intact</td>
<td>Umand is village name, but site name is Runda which means old village that was flooded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncha</td>
<td>25°8’32.4” N 74°27’21.3” E</td>
<td>Moderately disturbed; partly leveled; currently plowed for agriculture</td>
<td>Site is locally called Khera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viroli-Kehdo</td>
<td>24°43’5.7” N 74°16’53.2” E</td>
<td>Highly disturbed. Top three meters were removed with earth-mover and pushed to west to make a terrace for new construction; 3-4 m deposit remain</td>
<td>Previously called Viramgam and ancient name is Viratnagar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The team was based in Gilund for much of the census, concentrating on those sites within a few hours’ drive of Gilund. Part of the census was based out of Udaipur and focused on sites within a few hours’ drive of Udaipur as well as to the east within the vicinity of the city of Chittorgarh. Sites were located using a combination of regional...
highway maps, GPS to locate coordinates provided by each published survey and by asking locals along the way. This collection of strategies relied heavily on local knowledge of places and place names and also made us cognizant of a number of important factors that shaped the final outcome of our project. Such concerns include, but are certainly not limited to: problems associating archaeological sites with modern villages, incorrect geographic data in previously published records and maps and general interpersonal interactions with our driver, translator and the local residents we encountered during the census. We highlight the latter concern in particular, as such mundane interactions have an immense impact on the framing of daily research goals and methods in the field and as a result, on the collection and integrity of data. Analyzing the role of such interactions in archaeological data collection helps shed light on the ways that archaeological narratives are created. Here we outline some of the issues that arose during the course of our own census project as well as our manner of dealing with them.

**Toponyms, Social Memory, and Geography**

Toponyms can be a complex and multi-dimensional affair in India as villages, geographical features, and other localities are often called by various names by different communities and groups and place names often change over time. These circumstances are only partly mitigated, but also sometimes complicated, by the fact that many archaeological sites are named after the closest living village at the time of discovery. The collection of oral histories about a village often revealed details that helped us understand more about the origins of the village name or alternate names of earlier settlements. Historic names may persist to the present day; however, they also evolve over time. For example, the inhabitants of the village of Morwan reported that the town used to be called Mordhwaj, after a Raja Mor-dhwaj, who had established his capital there (Hooja 1988: 194). There are also some instances where newer settlements built on top of, or adjacent to, older abandoned sites are given new names, such as the site of Devri Doonka, which was built over a previous village known as Hani that was destroyed by earthquake sometime in the past. While archaeologists tend to refer to sites by the name of the nearest village, the residents often use a different name such as Khera, meaning place, or village. At the site of Umund, the locals referred to the site as “Runda” which means ‘old village that was flooded’.

Local inhabitants interviewed during the census project also helped to shed light on the cultural geography of the area by recounting the social memory of long standing connections between villages. For instance, interviews revealed that Mordhwaj had once encompassed 21 villages, including the site of Palod, which is at least five kilometers away. After suffering an earthquake approximately 1000 years ago villagers told us that Mordhwaj broke apart and that the villages in existence today were built atop the remains. Similarly, the sites of Gogathala, Meroli, and Rashmi are all associated with an ancient city called Patten, which was reportedly also destroyed by an earthquake. These sites may have all been connected into one urban center in the past, or alternatively, some may have been considered “suburban” or satellite
communities supporting the larger settlement. Without these social memories to guide us, the connections between these towns may never have come to light.

Similarly, it was only after discussion with local people that we often came to understand that different localities of a village may be assigned different names, thus accounting for some of the observed variation in toponyms. The identification of sites having multiple names was also problematic when depending on road maps which sometimes had an official name different from the one familiar to archaeologists. All of these issues were addressed by paying close attention to contextual details in each published survey and by asking multiple people about places and place names both during our search for sites as well as when we had reached a specified village.

Incorrect Data
The challenge of incorrect and/or imprecise data is one that almost every scholar must confront when revisiting research that has already been carried out. The examples we cite here are in no way a statement about the methodology employed by previous researchers during their own explorations, which are quite commendable in their own right. Rather, they serve to demonstrate the highly contingent nature of field research and the way in which that may impact project results. In many cases, published site coordinates were inaccurate, and we had trouble locating the sites. This results from a historic practice of listing the longitude and latitude of the nearest living village, not necessarily the site itself, which may be located a kilometer or more from the village center. As we found each site, we were able to update the coordinates through the use of GPS. In addition, there were also instances when the team encountered archaeological remains that contradicted accounts given in published surveys. Site size was one such description where we sometimes observed inconsistencies. In the case of Rawalia, after speaking with several locals during our visit, we began to realize that the site, which had been reported as small and mostly destroyed, was larger and more intact than previously recognized. After being shown a second mound at some distance from the existing village, we noted that many of the surrounding agricultural fields were slightly elevated and had a relatively high density of surface artifacts suggesting that settlement in the area may have once been on a much larger scale than previously assumed. Published surveys sometimes also limited their documentation to specific time periods, such as the Chalcolithic, when evidence of occupation during the later Iron Age and Medieval periods became apparent during our visits. At the same site discussed above, villagers showed us several structural features which may have served as grinding mills for processing oilseeds, as well as the remains of a small medieval period shrine located near the second mound. Although no longer in use, the villagers had several stories about the shrine. One story claimed that many years ago, a man had unearthed a pot of gold coins at the entrance to the shrine after having dreamt about it. Taken together, our findings suggested that the settlement was at one point quite large and may have served as an important regional center. Again, this is not to discredit the work of previous researchers but to highlight the subjective nature of archaeological observation as well as the highly contingent conditions under which
such observations are carried out. When inaccuracies were detected in the existing
data, they were corrected using GPS and through photo-documentation and note
taking. As with the above issue with toponyms, our strategy for addressing incorrect
data and unexpected results also involved discussion with multiple people and again
emphasized the importance of interpersonal relations, as discussed below.

Interpersonal Data
During the course of any field work, numerous people from various spheres will be
involved and so the interpersonal dimension is perhaps the most important to
consider. In addition to team members and any dynamic that exists between them, the
relationship between the researchers and local residents is certainly significant.
Especially in small villages located far from any known tourist attraction, the sudden
arrival of inquisitive strangers, some of them foreign, may startle local inhabitants,
making them wary and unwilling to open up. In addition, language barriers between
English, Hindi, and Mewari also shaped our interactions and the patience of locals and
various interpreters also affected these exchanges. After long days of work in multiple
villages, our team, which included a mix of Indian and foreign researchers, sometimes
became a little too comfortable with our outsider status, forgetting how our
unannounced appearance in a new village may have been perceived by locals. For
example, when visiting the village of Fachar one afternoon, we initially had difficulty
locating anyone willing to speak to us about the village history and were directed to
one small shop located near one of the village temples. As our team descended on the
stall, the poor shopkeeper was so startled that he completely froze as he continued to
pour dal into the sack of a waiting customer. It was several minutes before he was able
to collect himself and then exclaim that he knew nothing about the village history. This
prompted other villagers, who had gathered around us by then, to suggest other
elderly residents to whom we might speak. Although sometimes humorous, our
impact on local attitudes was extremely important to keep in mind, as suspicious
villagers are often cautious about sharing any information with outsiders.
Alternatively, smiles and an open attitude often created a favorable impression, and
highlighted the importance of rapport-building in any anthropological endeavor. The
inclusion of women in our group also significantly impacted our ability to establish a
sense of trust and goodwill within communities. If our team had only consisted of
males, it is possible that women in the villages would have been unwilling to engage
with the group, and thus a vital source of local information would have been
neglected.

There also may be times when local events can affect the willingness of inhabitants to
share their stories. Our visit to the site of Palod occurred on a day when elections were
being held, making locals somewhat suspicious of our presence. After spending some
time with a group of residents, we noted their unwillingness to share any more than
some basic information and realized that there was some fear we had come to disrupt
the voting process. Although this was disappointing and we had hoped the people
would have been able provide us with their account of the historical connection with
neighboring Morwan, we decided not to press the issue, thanked them for their help and continued on with our work. In this way, we must sometimes accept the fact that we are not welcome in some communities at certain times.

Limitations put on research by Institutional Review Boards also affected our ability to collect oral histories about various sites, as we were limited to talking to those over 18 years of age. At times, English and Hindi-speaking teenagers were knowledgeable and eager to work with us, but our research protocols prevented us from continuing our conversation once we learned their age. In addition, excited children who followed us too often jumped into our site photos, rendering them unusable. Thus a portion of the things we learned had to be discarded.

In addition to our interaction with local residents, the inclusion of a driver and translator to our project also added further elements for deliberation. Archaeological exploration can be hard on drivers, particularly those feeling a sense of responsibility for their cars. Generally accustomed to driving on highways and known tourists routes, an urban driver may become irritated when asked to travel off the beaten track or, what is more often the case, off the track altogether. Furthermore, our uncertainty when looking for some villages sometimes contributed to our driver’s frustrations as he was more used to travelling between familiar points. City drivers sometimes struggle with navigating in villages – a reminder of the urban/rural divide that exists across India today; during one phase of our census when we used an urban driver, it was difficult to convince him to repeatedly stop to ask for directions. That being said, including our drivers in the research process proved to be an effective strategy for overcoming some of these difficulties. After a long and seemingly fruitless search, our discovery of the medieval shrine in Rawalia had a dramatically galvanizing effect on one previously grumpy driver who then became much more enthusiastic about the work and began to ask his own questions to the locals.

Similarly, working with an interpreter brought its own set of issues. An interpreter who joined us for one phase of the census was more familiar with urban settings and took some time to adjust to the long days and rougher conditions associated with field work. Nevertheless, she would also at times get very interested, particularly when people were eager to share stories, but would sometimes leave us behind in the discussion and have difficulty recalling details later on. Both our driver and translator were of enormous help to our research efforts and made many contributions. Our interactions with them were also a good reminder that research is dependent on many supporting team members. Anthropology is a people-oriented science but our consideration of interpersonal dynamics should not be limited to the dichotomy of researcher and subject; there are many others who contribute to the success of a field project and should not be ignored.

**Site Status**

While the site census has many benefits as described above, the main focus is the
enumeration and assessment of the status of documented sites. With the growth and development of rural areas around the world, many sites are threatened by development activities such as the expansion of agriculture, construction of schools, hospitals, roads, and businesses, and quarrying of mineral resources. These processes of construction and extraction are vital to the growth of the economy; however, it is clear that they also impact places of historic significance. As a result, a critical part of assessing the status of historic preservation includes regular undertakings of enumeration such as that done recently by the Archaeological Survey of India and the National Mission on Monuments and Antiquities. The results of such censuses help to shape preservation goals and methods while identifying those sites in most need of preservation.

In our census, we found that half of the sites examined were heavily encroached or fully destroyed. For example, Purani Marmi, a site that once spread across several hectares, and known for the bountiful presence of terracotta bull figurines, is now limited to a small area of approximately 20m x 20m directly under a small local temple. The rest of the area now appears as unused land since it has been excavated and leveled by villagers who borrowed the soil for use in construction and later used the area for agricultural activities. Similarly, the sites of Uncha and Maharaj ki Khedi have been leveled to make farming feasible, while other sites have been dug to allow growing villages to build additional houses, shops, schools, and clinics. Much of this activity appears to be very recent and coincides with the recent availability of diesel-powered earth movers in the area. These machines are relatively cheap to rent and can level a site in a matter of hours. When villagers do not consider the material remains to be significant, they do not preserve them.

During our census, we devoted considerable time talking to village residents about the sites, collecting oral histories about the people who once lived there as well as recent activities of destruction and development. Through these conversations, we identified a number of conditions that led to the preservation or destruction of sites. We found that many of the oral histories about sites include morality tales that explain whether the inhabitants had been moral or immoral and how that affected the fate of the village. Several sites that had been heavily encroached or completely destroyed were associated with stories where God had punished immoral village residents by destroying the village or parts of the village. Our team concluded that perhaps the association of the archaeological site with immoral people made it vulnerable to destruction for development. After all, if God had first destroyed the site, why should it be preserved now?

In contrast, sites that were actively preserved by communities were associated with positive morality tales. Other stories associated with archaeological sites also have a protective effect. For example, when excavations were planned for Gilund, in the late 1990s, some residents told stories to the archaeologists that suggested that disturbing the mound would lead to punishment and death.
Finally, we found that those parts of sites that are topped by temples or *durgais* are often preserved, although just a few meters beyond the precincts of these holy places, the land was treated differently, and in many cases encroached upon. Many contemporary villages that we visited have been built on top of ancient sites. The land directly under current structures is quite preserved as is land underneath metaled roads. However, land in the courtyard of contemporary constructions is often excavated to enlarge the space and make more room for animals or the construction of additional rooms as families grow. At Chatrikhera, for example, stories of an individual who built their house on top of the mound, level with the temple, was punished by God because the morning sun touched the new house before touching the temple. Such morality tales prevented development on top the mound, but unfortunately, did not prevent the excavation and leveling of the mound, as this was seen as a different sort of activity.

In sum, we found extensive encroachment and destruction such that many archaeological sites are now effectively gone or unrecognizable. Most of these activities occurred as a result of economic development. Our research also found that the oral traditions connected to the sites greatly influences attitudes towards archaeological sites and village preservation efforts. As a result, the development of any preservation program must consider the local needs of development and understandings of the past. Our findings also highlight the need for rapid and effective documentation strategies, such as those afforded by exploration oriented census projects.

**Discussion**

As discussed in the examples above, there were many different elements guiding the outcome of our census project. From incorrect maps to recalcitrant drivers, our key strategies for navigating through the ups and downs of our explorations involved constant and consistent communication with all involved personnel. Although the methodology employed during this census by no means approached the more systematic nature of a “survey” project, revisiting some of these previously documented sites revealed much useful information for understanding issues of local heritage and site preservation that will be of tremendous value for future archaeological research in the region. The relatively informal nature of our census plan allowed us to incorporate this project into the schedule of the MPAA, and thus a broader regional view can now also be incorporated into our own larger program of research. Furthermore, reflection on our experiences during the census also highlighted some key themes that emerge when conducting archaeological research, particularly the importance of interpersonal relationships and attitudes and their effect on project outcomes. These sorts of considerations are not only important for projects such as our census, but also for more rigorous research programs of survey, excavation and analysis. As focus shifts more heavily towards the collection of scientific data, the human dimension of our work may sometimes be neglected. We argue that this should never be the case, and hope the examples provided here have been able to furnish some evidence of that.
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