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THE LATE-VICTORIAN HISTORIES OF INDIAN ART OBJECTS: POLITICS AND AESTHETICS IN JAIPUR'S ALBERT HALL MUSEUM

By Tina Young Choi

RECENT GUIDEBOOKS FOR THE WESTERNER traveling to Northern India generally refer the prospective visitor to a common range of cities around Delhi – Agra, Jaipur, and Udaipur; within these, the Taj Mahal, Jaipur's Pink City and nearby Amber Fort, and Udaipur's glamorous lake palaces usually merit must-see status. Until its refurbishment a few years ago, the Albert Hall Museum, an elaborate structure with old-fashioned interiors and a location a kilometer south of Jaipur's city center, ranked as a second- or even third-tier tourist attraction; travel guides from recent years mention it with indifference, describing its collections as "dusty" and "fine, if carelessly exhibited" (Bindloss and Singh 170), or even suggesting that "a slow circular turn around the building in a car will suffice" (*Frommers* 520). Yet a century ago the Museum proudly occupied a primary place in British travel guides to India.[1] It opened with ceremony and fanfare in 1887, and by 1898 almost three million Indian and over ten thousand European visitors had passed through its doors (Hendley, *Report* 9). A striking example of colonial architecture, constructed of white stone with numerous courtyards, covered walkways, and ornamented domes (Figure 1), it was regarded as perhaps the most noteworthy edifice within a noteworthy Indian city. Thomas Holbein Hendley, resident Surgeon-Major in Jaipur, chief curator for the 1883 Jaipur Exhibition, and the Albert Hall Museum's Secretary and tireless champion, recommended that travelers in Jaipur for a single day make two visits, both morning and evening, to the site, and that those with an additional day to spend in the city schedule a third visit. Murray's *Handbook for Travellers in India, Burma and Ceylon* concurred, describing it as "a beautiful museum – an Oriental South Kensington, suitably housed" (174), and just after the turn of the century, English journalist Sidney Low recalled that it was "the best museum, with one exception, in all India, a museum which, in the careful selection and the judicious arrangement of its contents, is a model of what such an institution ought to be" (114).

Even before the opening of its museum, Jaipur (commonly transcribed as Jeypore during the Victorian period) had enjoyed an international reputation for its aesthetic achievements. The city's artistic contributions had been granted a central place in London's 1886 Indian and

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Figure 1. The Albert Hall Museum in Jaipur, India. From Thomas H. Hendley, *Handbook to the Jeypore Museum* (Calcutta: Calcutta Central Press Company, 1895), frontispiece. By kind permission of the H. H. Mu Far Eastern Library, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.

Colonial Exhibition (Tillotson 120), and the museum's establishment only helped to further its status in the British colonial imagination. Alongside other, considerably larger cities, like Bombay and Calcutta, Jaipur provided training to its rising artist and artisan classes through government-established Schools of Art, where examples of student work were also offered for sale to the public (Mitter 31). Its artisans had established reputations for working with the region's naturally rich supply of stones – marble, turquoise, sandstone, cobalt, and carbuncles – and had also gained renown for their expertise at textile work and enamelling, examples of which had been displayed and much admired in the major cities of Europe (*Rajputana Gazetteer* 127, 148). By the time English artist Walter Crane toured the region at the beginning of the twentieth century, he regarded a visit to Jaipur's art markets – and especially to its textiles vendors – as an obligatory part of his stay; while his accounts of other regions of India emphasized views of the countryside or descriptions of local architecture, his cultural exploration of Jaipur consisted largely of shopping for artisan-made goods (101, 110). But according to the period's historians, Jaipur was distinguished for accomplishments of another kind as well: during the 1857 Rebellion it played an important political role as a stronghold of loyalty and support for the British Crown.[2]

This essay draws on the considerable archive concerning the region's artistic productions to investigate the multiple ways in which aesthetic and political visions of Jaipur specifically, and of India more generally, converged during the last decades of the nineteenth century.

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Jaipur's status as what Low called a "centre of native manufactures" (173) means that a particularly rich record of travel guides, government reports, and arts catalogues from the period exists to support such historical examination; I also draw on recent historical and critical work, such as Patrick Brantlinger's study of the unlikely intellectual genealogy that joined Ruskin's aesthetics to Coomaraswamy's and Gandhi's nationalist efforts. Brantlinger offers a helpful model for examining the intersections between political and aesthetic theory in India, but here I direct attention towards the material objects and cultural contexts – the construction, promotion, and reception of the museum and the objects it housed – that constituted the foundation for those more abstract philosophical concerns. The narratives that emerged around these objects, both inside and outside the space of the museum, and the aesthetic principles and political practices that took part in shaping them, are the concerns to which these pages will attend.

As Jonah Siegel has argued, the nineteenth-century English museum presented a romantic, even erotic fantasy of geographically and temporally distant spaces – such as the Italy of past centuries – for its viewers (7). A similar critical reading could be extended to the representation of the colonies; Saloni Mathur notes that analogous exhibition spaces in England that offered displays of Indian arts, such as the Indian and Colonial Exhibition and stores like Liberty & Co. in the 1880s, evoked orientalist desires for untouched village landscapes and their exotic inhabitants (28–36). But these exhibitions and objects inspired other narratives as well; indeed, as numerous scholars have observed, the geographical circulation of these Indian objects was matched by a profound malleability of meaning according to viewer and context. Alternately cited as material proofs of indigenous authenticity or of an idealized colonial state, as evidence of native inferiority or as signs of a superior attention to craft, as emblems of transcendent spiritualism or as "instruments of commercial intelligence" (Driver and Ashmore 370), as symbols of an encompassing imperial knowledge or of personal reminiscence, these objects seemed unusually replete with signifying potential.[3] As Carol Breckenridge observes, "[o]bjects on display do *not* provide their own narrative" (205), and are thus readily shaped by curatorial and administrative agencies and incorporated into any number of other narratives, where they serve as focal points for a complex interplay of power and desire in the eyes of English observers. But what vision of Empire did exhibitions in India offer within colonized spaces, and especially to the colonized themselves? While considerable scholarly attention has been given to the display and consumption of Indian art objects in Europe, especially at the Great Exhibition, I shift my critical focus to consider the narratives, fantasies, and desires generated when these objects were assembled and displayed by British curators for Indian audiences in India, and also the alternate sets of meanings and purposes that emerged for these objects within the colonial context.

In the years before the museum's opening, Jaipur earned praise for its "modernity." Although at least one visitor criticized this perceived quality in the city, proclaiming that its "brand-newness, bad taste, and a hankering after European characteristics" rendered it unpleasant and of little interest to the traveler from Britain (Garrick 33), other Britons found a welcome reflection of the late-Victorian zeal for progress. These latter emphasized the city's enthusiastic embrace of careful urban planning, railways, sanitation projects, public health, schools, and paved roads (Hendley, *Jeypore Guide* 121–22, 125; *Rajputana Gazetteer* 158). In 1876 Hendley praised the current Maharaja's rule as one of Western-style "enlightenment and

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progress" (*Jeypore Guide* 108), and the *Rajputana Gazetteer* of 1879 concurred, proclaiming that Jaipur was "the most modern of the Rajput capitals" (85) and was "in many respects the finest of modern Hindu cities" (157). A decade before its opening, the prospective Albert Hall site was described in language suggesting that the new edifice would be similarly forward-looking, and would contain "a large hall for public meetings &c., with offices, a library and reading room, a museum, picture and sculpture galleries, billiard room and office," a gathering place with varied, European-style amusements and educational opportunities for the city's inhabitants (Hendley, *Jeypore Guide* 127). Even the design of the building, overseen by prominent engineer and architect Swinton Jacob, offered an optimistic statement about India's future. Constructed in the Indo-Saracenic style, which combined the horizontal lines of traditional Hindu architecture with the curved shapes typical of Byzantine and Italianate structures, it presented a vision of East and West meeting in a harmonious and mutually beneficial fashion (Metcalf, *Imperial Vision* 57–58).[4]

The building that eventually opened in 1887, however, looked to the past in many ways, and had a more exclusive purpose than had originally been envisioned. Intended to commemorate the Prince of Wales's visit to Jaipur in February 1876, when the foundation stone was laid, the establishment of the Museum gained momentum from both the 1883 Jaipur Exhibition, a temporary collection meant to assemble and recognize the finest examples of regional art, and the 1886 Indian and Colonial Exhibition in London, which featured Jaipur's numerous artistic contributions prominently.[5] As historian Giles Tillotson explains, Hendley personally oversaw the processes of consolidating the available displays from those earlier exhibits and of sourcing new art objects for permanent display. The Museum's collection thus built on the original Exhibition collection, which included both purchased and commissioned pieces, as well as on gifts from local nobility, and both the Exhibition and subsequent Museum collections were housed in wooden cases specially designed to replicate those found in the South Kensington Museum (Tillotson 115–21). The resulting collection, comprising more than fourteen thousand objects, was intended to serve as a visual catalogue of both regional and national design (Figure 2). According to Hendley's *Handbook to the Jeypore Museum*, a full range of India's traditional arts were on display, including metalwork, enamel work, jewelry, stamped and dyed textiles, gold and silver lace, embroidery, glass, examples of turbans, wood carvings, ivory, and pottery; a number of these were illustrated in the Museum's Catalogue (Figure 3). In addition to these, the Museum's rooms also featured photographs and paintings, as well as coins, religious pieces, and some Egyptian artifacts.

In spite of its generic and geographic coverage, however, the Museum's primary focus was on the regional crafts of Rajasthan, and in particular, on those that were thought to represent the area's traditional artisanal skills. The choice to focus on the traditional as exemplary was not Hendley's alone; rather, a number of British officials and art critics had publicly expressed the need to "call the attention of the public and ultimately of artisans and dealers to artistic qualities in older work . . . establishing a higher standard of taste in Indian Art Manufactures" throughout India (Buck ii). As articulated here and elsewhere, aesthetic and cultural progress meant looking to the past, preserving older ideals and methods against the incursions of modernization, especially the technologies and industries of Europe. Tillotson reads this undertaking as decidedly "anti-Western" in spirit (117),[6] but for Thomas Metcalf, such efforts exemplified the necessarily convoluted chronologies upon which the

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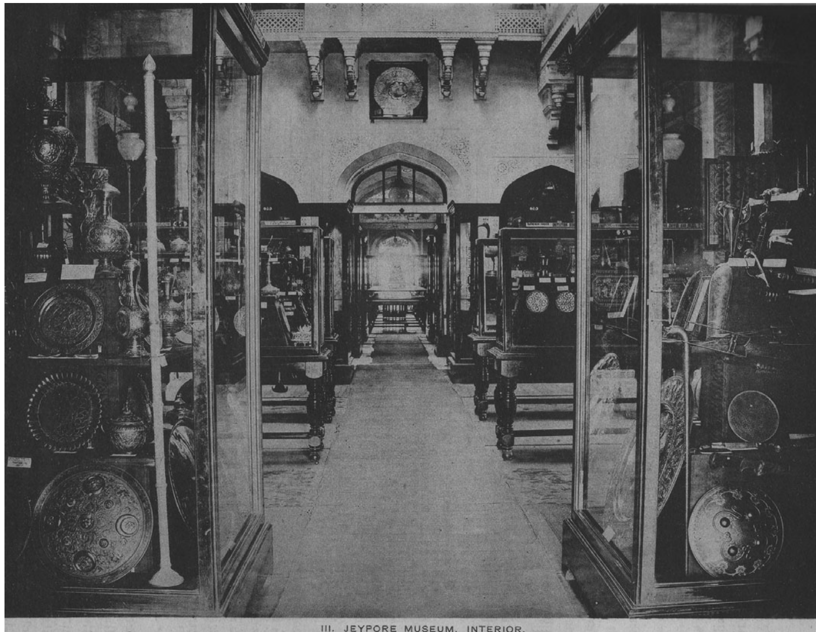

Figure 2. Jeypore Museum interior. From Thomas H. Hendley, *Handbook to the Jeypore Museum* (Calcutta: Calcutta Central Press Company, 1895), plate facing 6. By kind permission of the H. H. Mu Far Eastern Library, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.

Raj sustained itself: India seemed to demand modernization and development under the oversight of the British, but at the same time, its traditional culture was in need of protection and preservation, an argument that insisted on its place in a fixed, historical past (66). The period's accounts reveal elements of both visions of the traditional arts in India; like the Great Exhibition that took place in London, these Indian exhibitions inspired contrasting accounts of India's place in British narratives of progress.[7] In particular, writings on Jaipur suggest that aesthetic – and especially artisanal – production occupied the strategic center of a complex network of countervailing discourses, which did not easily lend themselves to a straightforward vision of a colonized culture's objectification or of agency reclaimed. These art objects were inserted and reinserted at will into narratives not just of modernization and preservation, but also of political fealty, native autonomy, and nationalist feeling. By reading these crafts as charged with multiple kinds of potential meaning, my approach in this essay also builds on Elaine Freedgood's recent study of Victorian "thing culture," within which the apparent stability of the material object conceals the instability of meaning associated with it – and often, a "disavowed historical narrative" in its shadows (8, 11). As her readings demonstrate, the material "thing," never stably fetish or commodity in the nineteenth century, exists within manifold narrative frameworks simultaneously. This essay examines some of the more visible frameworks, in which writers like George Birdwood and Hendley, in celebrating traditional art objects in Jaipur, revisited Ruskin's arguments

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Figure 3. A selection of the Museum's pottery. From Thomas H. Hendley, *Handbook to the Jeypore Museum* (Calcutta: Calcutta Central Press Company, 1895), plate facing 76. By kind permission of the H. H. Mu Far Eastern Library, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.

about artisanal labor and repoliticized those arguments in strategic ways. But it also seeks to illuminate some of those frameworks that were less evident, but no less political. The long shadow cast by the events of 1857, I argue, shaped representations of both traditional objects and the labor that produced them, and provided the foundation for an aesthetics of seeing and consuming that would reimagine their place in a historical narrative untouched by India's recent, turbulent past.

1. Artisan and Object

SCHOLARS LIKE BRANTLINGER AND Lara Kriegel have suggested that British perceptions of Indian arts and crafts complicated more conventional understandings of colonial and racial hierarchy. India's nonindustrialized condition, its focus on village life and a time-honored arts and crafts tradition, could be seen as potentially useful points of contrast to England's industrial technologies and mechanized modes of production, which writers like John Ruskin and William Morris had deplored. Ruskin, for example, sought to redirect public attention from the economic value of produced objects to the spiritual and aesthetic value

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of the artisan's labor, from mechanical efficiency to the essential humanity revealed through individual effort; from this perspective, English industrial progress might seem not at all superior to an Indian culture of crafting objects individually by hand.[8]

Hendley and his contemporary George Birdwood, a onetime administrator in Bombay and an official with the India Office, devoted their energies and their lives to promoting the Indian arts. For them, Ruskin's art criticism served as a productive starting-point for their own writing, for grappling with similar questions concerning the value and significance of Indian art objects. Their work alludes to and engages with Ruskin's oeuvre, especially with "The Nature of the Gothic," a chapter in his *The Stones of Venice*, while also redirecting it to suit the different political ends that the Indian context demanded. In doing so, they articulated a political theory of native artisanal labor and at the same time modeled a strategic practice for the curating and viewing of native art objects.

As the author of one of the period's authoritative texts on the subject, the encyclopedic *Industrial Arts of India*,[9] Birdwood, like Hendley, also oversaw numerous exhibitions of Indian art. Even as he promoted Indian arts and textiles to an international audience, however, Birdwood adapted Ruskin's aesthetic theories in the service of maintaining the accepted hierarchies of Empire.[10] At times in his *Industrial Arts*, Birdwood celebrated the native aesthetic tradition, calling "everything, down to the cheapest toy or earthen vessel . . . more or less a work of art" precisely because they were "hand wrought" (*Industrial Arts* 146). Yet he also quite explicitly suggested that Indian craftspeople fell short of Ruskin's artisanal ideal. Immediately after describing the everyday Indian object as "a work of art," he dismisses the skill of the Indian artisan as part of a "crystallised tradition," quite unlike "the inventive genius of the [English] artist, acting on his own spontaneous inspiration" (*Industrial Arts* 146).[11] Thus Birdwood acknowledges that even the humblest artisan's work has aesthetic value because it is not a mechanized, industrialized production. But where Ruskin argued that the "signs of the life and liberty of every workman who struck the stone" are legible in the very roughness and imprecision of his handiwork (*Stones* 163; vol. 2, ch. 6), Birdwood denies the existence of a corresponding spiritual independence and potential for transcendence in his native counterpart. In Birdwood's account, Indian artisans might not be slaves to a tyrannical master, as Ruskin's Egyptian or Assyrian workers were, or to a brutal system of mass production, as Victorian factory workers were, but as something like slaves to an inherited tradition whose practices and skills are determined by the past, they lack the capacity for liberty. Where the European worker, as Ruskin argued, expressed the "whole majesty" of his soul through manual effort (*Stones* 162; vol. 2, ch. 6), his Indian counterpart scarcely seems to possess a spiritual dimension; rather, he is fixed into a "hereditary," essential nature over which he has no control (*Industrial Arts* 413). Elsewhere Birdwood seems to allude directly to Ruskin's formulation when, in his commentary on an exhibit of Indian textiles, he writes that even the finest contributions are "yet wanting in just this spiritualising element . . . the highest magistery of craftsmanship" (*Catalogue* 17). For Birdwood, then, Ruskin's aesthetic hierarchies could be made to reaffirm the racial and cultural ones upon which imperialism depended.

In Jaipur, Hendley generated his own reading of Ruskin's work, employing it to shape a compelling vision of the ways in which aesthetics and politics might align. While Birdwood had alluded to the independent spirit of Ruskin's European artisan only to deny its existence among Indians, Hendley represented the manual labor of the Indian artisan differently when he described the pottery of Jaipur as especially worthy of regard because it "required an

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individual effort of mind to produce – something, in short, which is not a mere mechanical repetition" (*Handbook* 84–85). Yet the ambivalence that characterized Birdwood's account is present, and perhaps even more pronounced elsewhere in Hendley's writing. Even in the opening pages of his *Handbook to the Jeypore Museum*, he echoes Birdwood in discrediting the artworks contained within it as "such as would be made by clever, hereditary craftsmen, with wonderful dexterity of touch and keen colour sense, but without sufficient knowledge or mental education to grasp a great law or to originate a truly noble work" (6), and elsewhere he writes that the Indian artisan is "a man of very imitative tendencies, who has been ever ready to follow the lead of the stronger mind, or the most powerful fashion of the time" (*Handbook* 26). Although an "individual effort of mind" might be located in select pieces of pottery, these other, sweeping statements find the Indian craftsmen lacking in the mental independence that characterized Ruskin's workers. Native artisans, Hendley implies in these passages, remain inferior due to their own essential limitations, the "hereditary" skills that reflect a set of sensory, even physiological capacities – a "dexterity of touch and keen colour sense" – rather than the developed spiritual and intellectual ones of their Western counterparts.

Yet even as Birdwood and Hendley critiqued Indian artisans as a group, they still represented their crafts as a worthy alternative to English or English-style manufactured goods, and promoted exemplary pieces commercially to both the local and regional communities that produced them, as well as to an international market in England and elsewhere. Like Morris in England, these two champions of the Indian arts found no inconsistency between the commercial and the aesthetic, and indeed, cultivating appreciative consumers was, in part, a way of ensuring the survival and preservation of those traditional arts against the incursions of industrial and mechanistic modes of production. But they also promoted the production of certain kinds of narratives around these objects, ones that emphasized non-native modes of circulation through exhibition galleries and English drawing rooms. By encouraging viewers to regard the everyday objects of Indian life – pottery, textiles, metalwork – as art, they strategically reduced attention to potentially troublesome, homegrown ways of seeing and consuming.

The *Journal of Indian Art*, whose foremost contributors included Hendley, Birdwood, and John Lockwood Kipling, drew attention to production and consumption from the outset, in the preface to the first issue.[12] In broad terms, the *Journal*'s objective was preservationist, "to prevent the decline of Indian Art" (Buck i). More specifically, its authors, joining aesthetic to economic goals, aimed both to provide an education in taste among Indian artisans and to cultivate a consumer base for these objects, to "increase[e] the demand for them" while also "facilitating their supply" (Buck i). In some cases, the imagined market was a native one. Tillotson emphasizes this when he attends to the explicitly didactic purposes for which the Museum, like the Exhibition that preceded it, was established. According to Hendley its informal lessons in taste and aesthetics were designed to benefit both artisans, who would "see good specimens of art," and unskilled commoners, who would be "amuse[d] and instruct[ed]"; the education of these two groups would necessarily "lead to increased manufacture of rare and beautiful objects" (qtd. in Tillotson 122). Birdwood, too, had taken care to link the progress of the native population to aesthetic appreciation and to a more enlightened consumerism: "In consequence of the improvement of national taste in this country, and the spread of higher education and culture among the natives of India, we may hope for a rapid increase in the demand for Indian handloom made and artistically dyed and printed piece goods" (*Industrial Arts* 328). But both also imagined Europeans,

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and especially the British, as a primary market for this improved artisanal work. Birdwood's comprehensive survey of Indian art was intended for both professional and touristic British consumers, as a reference for curators "completing the India Museum collections, and to the general public as a guide to the places in India where they may obtain objects of genuine native art" (*Industrial Arts* vi–vii). Likewise, Hendley's *Handbook* refers to the possibility of purchasing copies of the Museum's exhibited works (40), and his later guide for British visitors to the city followed its description of the Museum and official School of Art with a list of recommended dealers from whom to buy "specimens of local industries," as if the natural result of having visited a museum was a desire to purchase one of its objects (*Notes* 9).

Preserving India's arts, then, meant both expanding the viewer's conception of what constituted "art" to encompass everyday objects, and commercializing them for international consumption. But these processes also enacted a shift in the temporal and geographical frames surrounding these objects. Removing them to museums or to private homes both in the colonies and abroad unmoored them from their local purposes, and from their present-tense existence within local economies and the immediacy of more local modes of consumption. The object – clay pot, printed cotton, metal screen – became a diffracted representation of that existence, rendered atemporal by these alternate settings and situated within a different, British-centered mode of consumption as aesthetic object.

The museum and exhibition, then, were designed to retrain visitors, both native and non-native alike, to see these objects through new eyes – not to ignore their status as objects for consumption, but to learn to consume them in a new way. These spaces enact Birdwood's claim that "everything, down to the cheapest toy or earthen vessel . . . [is] more or less a work of art"; they encourage viewers to see the objects of everyday life – whether in the museum, the marketplace, or the streets – from the appreciative perspective of the museum-goer. The toy and vessel, removed physically or imaginatively from their local functions within child's play or meal preparation, gain new meaning in this context.

One unusual contribution to the third number of the *Journal* demonstrates this process of recontextualization. While most of the *Journal*'s pieces describe art objects in the distanced tones of the professional critic, a more personal essay by Marion Rivett-Carnac,[13] an author of children's literature and occasional journalistic pieces about India, leads readers into the crowded streetscape and illustrates the very act of reframing that Birdwood encouraged. In "An Afternoon's Ramble in an Indian Bazaar," the author describes in some detail the various decorative objects she finds there: the metal anklets, intricately beaded bracelets, exotic perfumes, hand-printed cottons, and colorful embroidered caps; but among these she includes purchases of a different sort altogether. She visits a sweet shop in the marketplace of Allahabad – not to purchase some of the "sugary stores," which she finds repulsive and unclean – but to buy one of the seller's lamps which, as she explains, "enable the seller of sweetmeats to hawk his enticing wares by night" (7). Similarly, when she visits the silversmith's shop, she is interested not in the wares he produces for sale, but in the very tools that serve as his means of production: "We bought his hammer, his mould for wire-drawing, another mould used for stamping patterns on rings and bangles, and his touchstone" (7). To be sure, there is an element of the anthropological investigator and collector in Rivett-Carnac's fascination with the everyday, but her interest seems to lie much less in persons, who appear almost incidental to her expedition, than in the objects associated with them; they and their labor are not essential elements of the object, as Ruskin had asserted, but are

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disembodied traces only obliquely linked to its value as art. Indeed the city's streets and shops exist as a particularly vivid display of art objects, in which not just the decorative products of artisanal labor – the bracelets and cloths – but also the implements of their production are available for her consumption; as she declares, the workers' implements are "often very artistic" (7). Thus, just as hammer and lamp are removed from their contexts as necessary tools for the trade, the tradesmen and their shops seem strangely removed from their context within an active marketplace. Her "Ramble" admits no role for the objects and people who inhabit those displays, outside the ones they hold with relation to her viewing and consuming presence.

Where Birdwood urged readers to view everything in India, even "the cheapest toy or earthen vessel," as art, Rivett-Carnac's account, published in the very journal that was devoted to Indian art's elevation and celebration, took that recommendation to heart. It foregrounds the kind of viewing and narrativizing that Birdwood's aestheticizing perspective necessitates, and its blind spots are also suggestive of the alternate narratives that a different participant at the scene might have produced.

2. *The Politics of Display and Exchange*

ONE OF THE NARRATIVES CENTRAL to the British experience in India began in 1857 when native soldiers in Bengal, feeling that their British superiors had subjected them to string of injustices, turned against both military and civilian residents. The violence that spread across northern India came to an official end in the summer of 1858, but these cataclysmic events maintained a powerful hold on the British imagination for the remainder of the century. While these military and political concerns might seem a world apart from the polite spaces of the exhibition gallery, for both Hendley and his contemporaries the rebellion cast a long shadow over all aspects of British relations with its colony. The events of 1857 are, I suggest, just discernible in the background of these discussions about Rajasthani arts. Hendley's treatment of Rajasthan's political role during the rebellion has numerous consequences for his representation of the region's aesthetics; indeed, drawing on Ruskin's linking of the political and the aesthetic, he strategically invests his account of the region's government and history with a similar set of medieval ideals.

Representing India – and especially Rajasthan – as medieval was a common strategy at the time, among both critics and admirers of the colony's attributes (Metcalf, *Ideologies* 72–79). For Birdwood and Hendley, that strategy also merged comfortably with an aestheticism that valorized artisanal labor, but they differed appreciably in their interpretation of the political significance of the Indian village. As Brantlinger's reading suggests, Birdwood's account, while not openly anti-imperialist, offered the possibility of a form of governance that did not depend on the oversight of a colonial power (477–79). For example, in a lecture before the Society of Arts in 1879, he described Indians as "a people whose social and municipal institutions are based in perpetuity on a democratic organisation of their inherent right and property in the national soil" (*Two Letters* 21). His reading of the political organization of the village, like his representation of Indian artisanal skill, verges on the essentialist; but at the same time, it implies that its inhabitants have a natural right to political self-determination. By proffering this image of stable self-government, Birdwood's work might well have provided some of the inspiration for later nationalist movements. Yet at the same time this picturesque scene contains no revolutionary momentum; rather, it describes an unquestioned and inherent,

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even autochthonous democracy. The distinction emerges more forcefully elsewhere, when he elaborates on the difference between English and Indian political motives:

> There is no stimulus to individual exertion [in India], and the mass of the people are only too well contented to go on for ever in the same old-fashioned conservative ways as their fathers from time immemorial before them. In England the law of primogeniture, while so hard on younger sons, by throwing them on their own resources, to provide for themselves in the free professions . . . has had the most beneficial influence on the energy of the race. (*Two Letters* 19)

While this account makes no explicit effort to justify colonial governance, it situates India as nonetheless stagnant.[14] Its people lack a spirit of independence and rebelliousness, a spirit he identifies as one of England's greatest attributes, as indeed the driving force behind English progress and change. Further, the parallel Birdwood generates here between Indians and the dispossessed "younger sons" of England is telling; where both occupy, arguably, the subordinate position within a Britain figured as an extended family, there is a striking disparity between the inherent complacency of the "mass of the people" in India and the self-reliance and agency of England's individuals.

Where Birdwood's Indian village was an inert, undeveloped, and even underpoliticized state, Hendley's imagined village was, by contrast, both politicized and highly self-aware. But rather than being infused with the democratic principles that his counterpart had imagined, Hendley's Rajasthan was a space drawn from the pages of Ruskin's idealized history of "all ages and all countries," in which peasants and workers gladly paid "noble reverence" to their rulers (*Stones* 165; vol. 2, ch. 6). In Hendley's account of the region's history, imperial governance and loyalist ties had been consistently and willingly reaffirmed; indeed, as his and others' histories repeatedly attested, Jaipur, in particular, had been faithful to the British during the 1857 uprisings (Hendley, *Rulers*; *Rajputana Gazetteer* 53). According to Hendley, that loyalty was a reflection not of modern political strategy or opportunism, but rather of the state's traditional organization; situated in an approximation of the medieval past, the residents of Jaipur understood their allegiance to the Maharaja in the same way that the Maharaja understood his allegiance to the British Crown: in terms of a feudal system of governance.[15] Elaborating on Ruskin's political vision, he writes that the inhabitants of Rajasthan were ever ready to "prove their loyalty by using their swords on behalf of the paramount sovereign," and elsewhere he appeals to images of faithful knights and codes of honor by describing the local Rajasthani princes as "liege lord[s]" and their behavior as "chivalrous" (*Rajputs* 6, 12). Indeed, he anticipates some future moment when the fealty they demonstrated in 1857 might again serve the British, when "this noble, if somewhat mediaeval, spirit may yet some day be used for the good of the empire" (*Rajputs* 6). Hendley thus locates in Rajasthan a fulfillment of Ruskin's medieval politics. Moreover, this "feudal" spirit characterized not only the region's relationship to England, but also the internal politics of the Rajasthani state. The typical local ruler "settled disputes in a truly patriarchal way; he punished crime; he protected the poor, and even fed his clansmen, as, indeed, everyone else in times of famine and scarcity; he helped on such occasions as marriages and deaths with money to meet the additional expenditure of such occasions; and in return the lord expected and received similar support" (*Rajputs* 22). Hence while Birdwood had read the village as a site of inherent democracy among its inhabitants, Hendley reinterprets the village as a space in which a natural and accepted hierarchy operates. Within his reading, the benignant ruler

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and the just system of patronage and protection he oversaw among his subjects were also, implicitly, a reflection of Britain's own relationship to her colonies.

Moreover, in this almost Carlylean fantasy of naturally respected leaders and loyal subjects, Hendley, like Ruskin, posited that a clear connection existed between politics and aesthetics: ever solicitous for his people's physical comfort and well-being, the local ruler sponsored architectural and artistic projects for their benefit as well. As he explains,

> Some of the most beautiful illustrations of the care of the Rajput princes for their people are to be found in Rajputana. I refer to the wonderful artificial lakes . . . huge dams, some of which are constructed of marble and are crowned with magnificent halls and temples . . . the magnificent and striking palaces of the chiefs have led to the outlay of much money thus supporting many trades and occupations. (*Rajputs* 26)

The sign of good government, then, lay not only in a ruler's economic concern for his subjects – through the employment of artisans and builders – but also in his aesthetic leadership – through the production of admirable and worthy designs. Hendley's conception of the relationship between the aesthetic and political thus redirected Ruskin's celebration of the artisan's potential, as it also reimagined Jaipur in particular, a city that others had singled out not for its adherence to tradition but for its modern infrastructure. Even as Hendley drew upon Ruskinian aesthetics when he noted that Jaipur's pottery constituted an "individual effort of mind," here he nonetheless seems less concerned with the individual spirit revealed through the artistic undertaking than with its role in mediating the relationship between rulers and populations. His description of Rajasthan implies that the accomplishment lies not so much with the workers who crafted these structures, as with the admirable ruler who directed and sponsored their creation.

Hence, comparing the Indian arts to "mediaeval European work" (*London* 12), he also strategically qualifies Ruskin's celebratory description of artistic labor, such that the workmen in nineteenth-century India are

> what one could imagine, the workmen who built the great Cathedrals of Europe were – each man taking a part, not as a mere machine, but as a creator bound down only to work on a certain framework, and not to exceed certain limits, but with liberty to exert the whole of his skill in building or decorating the special portion of the structure allotted to him. (*London* 13)

Just as Hendley's debt to Ruskin's aesthetics is clear here, so, too, is his departure from it. He adopts Ruskin's approach to mechanized labor, describing the artisan's work as its opposite. The workman is a "creator," exercising "liberty" through art and labor. But where Ruskin had identified "signs" of the worker's unqualified "life and liberty" in gothic ornament (*Stones* 163; vol. 2, ch. 6), Hendley carefully circumscribes the Indian worker's act of creation by making note of its perimeters. In Hendley's formulation, he operates within "a certain framework," "certain limits," his labor extending only to the "portion of the structure allotted to him." What Ruskin had called "Revolutionary ornament" (*Stones* 159; vol. 2, ch. 6) was, in this vision of India, tempered by a cautious politics whose origins lay in the well-remembered attempt at real revolution in 1857. The limited liberty accorded to the artisan in this account was sufficient to make the objects of his or her labor aesthetically worthy – certainly more worthy than mass-produced objects from English factories. But the artisan

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could claim no political agency through them; that belonged instead to those setting the limits and designating the allotments of his labor. In his reading of Rajasthan as a feudal state, these products of artisanal labor circulated as elements in a symbolic, precapitalist economy, one in which such objects and edifices functioned as signs of mutual secular devotion: just as the workers expressed their fealty through an aesthetic labor that glorified the state, so their lord expressed his loyalty and patronage by employing their services. Rather than celebrating the liberty of the artisan, as Ruskin's "The Nature of the Gothic" had done, Hendley's medieval rhetoric glorified his role within a political and social hierarchy.

It was perhaps as an expression of this relationship between ruler and subject, patron and worker, that Hendley imagined Jaipur's Albert Hall itself; as he explains, although the city would not decide to house a museum there until almost ten years later, it had settled on one of the site's purposes at a much earlier date: to commemorate the Prince of Wales's visit to Jaipur in 1876 (*Jeypore Guide* 127). Indeed we might understand the building as the culminating tribute in a long series of tributes exchanged between Britain and her colony. As Breckenridge has noted, the foreign objects in the 1851 Crystal Palace Great Exhibition, among which the Indian courts occupied the central place, were displayed as symbolic offerings to the Queen; similarly, the private collections of the other British royals consisted of numerous gifts from their Indian counterparts (203, 208). The Prince's 1876 visit to India was the occasion for further ceremonial gift-giving, such that local rulers competed to demonstrate their generosity and resources through lavish bestowals (Cohn 125–26). But in the eyes of Jaipur's prime minister, Thakoor Futeh Singh Chanpawat, the Maharaja was also himself the deserving recipient of gifts from the British on this occasion. The Prince's visit, he suggests, was itself a kind of public reward intended to recognize Jaipur's loyalty during the 1857 Rebellion, and in particular, the Maharaja's personal role in securing it; in Chanpawat's account, among the reasons given for the royal visit was the fact that "While the mutiny continued H. H. the Maharaja personally went round the city on horseback to see that all was right" (182). The Prince and his men also made a number of material gifts to his Indian hosts; in a formal ceremony, the Viceroy personally thanked the Maharaja for his family's support in 1857 and presented him with "2 horses with silver harness," and richly jeweled ornaments, including "One garland of pearls, which was put on the Maharaja's neck by the Viceroy himself" (Chanpawat 184). In later, private meetings, the Prince of Wales honored him with an engraved sword and medal (Chanpawat 273). These objects, like the allegiance of the city's royalty, were public expressions of political and personal devotion, of mutual recognition and alliance. Contextualized within this history of giving and receiving, the Museum building as well, dedicated on the occasion of the Prince's visit, served as a reaffirmation of both the city's royalist sentiment and its privileged status within the British Empire.

The building's design elements also represented a carefully composed tribute to Empire. While its overall structure was in the Indo-Saracenic style, its detailing consisted of "careful reproductions of well-known examples of decorative work in the palaces and tombs of Rajputana, Delhi, Agra, and Fatehpore Sikri" (Hendley, *Notes* 45–46).[16] By joining these disparate cities and regions across northern India, the Museum's architecture expressed both a symbolic political unity and a collective offering to the Crown. In this way, Jaipur issued a strong statement on behalf of neighboring cities about its own status when the museum opened on the thirtieth anniversary of the Rebellion. The purpose of the Prince's visit, which honored that original act of political loyalty in 1857, was memorialized for the ages in the

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form of this "Oriental South Kensington." Thus, for Hendley, not only the objects within the building but also the building itself would have celebrated – and maintained – a vision of an Indian feudal state and the traditional, artisanal labor that constituted its foundation.

As Mathur has astutely noted, the 1886 Indian and Colonial Exhibition, which had also looked to an India located in an anthropological and historical past, coincided with the first meeting of the Indian National Congress; the former served as an important counter-statement to the nationalist impulse of the latter, which anticipated a future in which Indians had an independent voice, albeit one situated within the constraints of Empire (54). The establishment of the Albert Museum, which gathered momentum from Jaipur's successes at the Exhibition the previous year, might be read as part of a similar attempt to compensate for the political uncertainties in India with a more reassuring colonial narrative. As the Congress opened the door to a powerful new vision of native rule, the Museum, like the Exhibition, presented an alternate model of nationhood and national unity, one whose foundation-stone was both literally and figuratively laid in recognition of imperial governance.

3. *Artisanal Nationalism*

As the Museum's impressive attendance figures indicate, native visitors flocked to these displays in overwhelming numbers in the 1880s and 90s. By suggesting that the local population must have felt a sense of "pride and pleasure . . . [in] a display that placed their own city's products at the heart of Rajasthani – indeed of Indian – identity," Tillotson attempts to reclaim a certain agency for the Indian producers and consumers involved (126). Indeed, he posits that both local artisans and native experts who helped to assemble objects for the museum's displays were not the victims of a British colonialist agenda, but rather active participants in shaping Hendley's curatorial direction and in making Jaipur an internationally respected center for artisanal work. Yet as much as these displays might have illuminated one element of Indian "identity," they elided others less readily contained by the walls and display cases of a museum.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, such objects played a significant role in a very different narrative, though one whose outlines are less easily traced. Pointing to some of the ways in which we might understand the alternate political connotations of these exhibitions, Peter Hoffenberg argues that the lavishness of colonial contributions to the Great Exhibition already signaled India's potential for economic, if not political, independence in 1851 (14), and that decades later, in the 1930s, the visual rhetoric of such displays – and their linking of image to identity – was adopted by nationalists to promote swadeshi, or "own country" (275–76),[17] a philosophy that celebrated the handcrafted object as a symbol of Indian self-sustenance and autonomy. Mathur cautions that, in drawing such connections, we have no "full account from the native's point of view: the very structure of the colonial archive does not allow for such an unmediated act of historical recovery" (54). Still, as both her and Hoffenberg's interventions suggest, that archive does allow for insight, albeit from an oblique angle, into some of the other historical narratives available – and more specifically, the alternate social and political contexts within which these objects circulated.

Swadeshi emerged as a visible and organized political movement in Bengal in the first decades of the twentieth century, and soon garnered widespread support and prominent champions in the form of philosopher-activists Ananda Coomaraswamy and Mahatma Gandhi (Bayly 310–13). Yet as some historians have observed, swadeshi, which linked

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an incipient nationalist impulse to the promotion of the production and consumption of homegrown, as opposed to British goods, had its origins in earlier decades. Although the details surrounding nineteenth-century swadeshi remain somewhat obscure, they note that traditional objects, especially textiles, assumed an important symbolic role in a range of sporadic anti-British political protests at the turn of the century (Bhattacharyya 111; Trivedi 2–4). C. A. Bayly observes that among those who resisted the British in 1857 were local villagers who claimed that the livelihoods of artisans had been destroyed by the forced importation of British goods (309), while Sumit Sarkar identifies its roots in widespread boycotts following the removal of duties and taxes on imported textiles in 1882 and again in 1896 (97). Sarkar argues that although these early movements emphasized economic solidarity among participants, they developed an increasingly political and nationalist tone as the century came to a close (96–97); indeed, by the 1890s, early nationalist Bal Gangadhar Tilak was publicly advocating the embrace of traditional crafts as a form of protest when he spoke at organized demonstrations and pro-Hindu festivals (Metcalf and Metcalf 149). Around the time of the Exhibition's and Museum's establishment, then, the everyday object that Birdwood had represented as a "work of art" was also gaining momentum as a political symbol, one whose production, purchase, and appreciation served as markers of a different sort of "pride" in Indian identity, a pride in the potential for independence from British rule.

Historians have drawn attention to the important role of advertising in mobilizing Indian consumers, especially the middle classes, as participants in swadeshi; early-twentieth-century examples linked the consumption of certain brands with an emerging idea of nation (Bhattacharyya 119–20; Metcalf and Metcalf 155–56, 196–97). But earlier advertisements, too, ones roughly contemporaneous with the opening of the Albert Hall Museum, encouraged similar forms of participation among their readers. Associating acts of consumption with national identity, these commercial notices in the *Indian Mirror*, a Calcutta newspaper, reveal some of the contrasting social and political ideals that one everyday object, the textile, represented at the time. An advertisement that appeared on the first page of an 1889 issue promoted the "Latest London Fashions," "English Printed Cambric," and "French Cambric," and featured an illustration of four gentlemen, racially ambiguous but garbed in European-style suits (Hamack and Boyce). Another on the same page, by contrast, promoted traditional "Pujah Collections" to the devout Hindu, and invited the reader "to their new shop of country-made Dhuties, Sharies, & Uranies" (Mullick Nephew & Co.).[18] The subtle language of traditional products and native artisanry embedded within this advertisement turned more explicitly strident in later ones; in his travel memoirs, Low observed that the local newspapers of the first decade of the twentieth century were filled with commercial announcements for home-grown products: "Patronise mother-country by purchasing country-made goods," commands one, while another asks readers to "Buy the Swadeshi ulsters, the strongest, the beautifullest, the best."[19] Textiles were perhaps the most visible symbol of political allegiance, but as historian Amit Bhattacharyya observes, a range of other products, including shoes, worked iron, cutlery, and jewelry, were also promoted and understood as examples of swadeshi production and consumption (113, 119). Whether the intended reader felt that he or she was making primarily an aesthetic statement, a political statement, or a little of both, this act of consumption carried a different significance in this context than it did in the Museum. Where the exhibition hall situated the viewer in a passive relation to displayed objects, which had been selected and presented by curatorial and artistic authorities, these advertisements invited a more dynamic personal relationship with the object. They

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encouraged active choices on the part of the consumer – of where to shop, of what to buy and wear – and those choices were figured as political acts, marks of one's attachment to religion, party, and nation. Further, where Hendley's accounts of the arts had placed them within a narrative of medieval warrior-princes and of British monarchs, these early advertisements have a distinctly modern flavor. Even as they advertise traditional wares like saris, they also suggest the possibility of a future shaped by each individual's participation and investment in the "mother-country." No longer part of what Birdwood had characterized as "crystallised tradition" of unquestioned practices inherited from the past, these objects are at the center of a dynamic economic and political present, where they also represent the possibility of mobilization and change.

Through public institutions like the Albert Hall Museum and publications like the *Journal of Indian Art*, Hendley and Birdwood rerouted Ruskin to suit largely colonialist ends. Yet it was not impossible, of course, to re-read both Ruskin's and even Birdwood's work for its liberatory potential, as Morris did starting in the 1870s.[20] Morris understood that Ruskin's championing of the individual artisan and his concomitant rejection of mass production might lend themselves to politically radical ends. But as Brantlinger reminds us, it was not Morris, who avoided any explicit statement about Indian independence, but instead an inspired Gandhi in 1904 who would realize the political potential that a rereading and rescripting of Ruskin's work might hold for India (Brantlinger 467, 472–76).

While colonial practice promoted its own interpretation of Ruskin's aesthetics, readers like Morris, Coomaraswamy, and Gandhi charted their own itineraries for their predecessor's aesthetic ideals. Thus, too, it becomes possible to imagine that at least some of those three million Indian visitors to the Museum in Jaipur experienced a different kind of "pride" in native art objects than Hendley had intended for them. Indeed, the emergence of swadeshi during this period invites these other readings, in which temporal and local contexts, and personal and political agencies, became inextricably associated with everyday objects, at the same moment in which the Museum itself, by elevating those same objects as "art," offered a countervailing narrative. A London *Times* review of the 1883 Exhibition and Hendley's Exhibition Catalogue is indeed suggestive of this tension; it begins by framing the event in the familiar language of medieval statehood: "The Maharajah of Jeypore, one of the principal chiefs of Rajpootana, enjoys the credit of having been the first of the feudatory princes of the Queen-Empress to hold an exhibition," in which he assembled "for the first time the artistic productions of India" ("The Jeypore Exhibition" 13). But what the article's opening describes as a sign of the Maharaja's aesthetic leadership, becomes by its end an act of political leadership. Borrowing the language of Milton's sonnet to Cromwell, the article closes with these words of praise for the Maharaja: "He has . . . reason to feel legitimate pride in the success of his own exhibition, and in having shown the other princes of India that 'peace has its victories no less renowned than war'" (13). By drawing a parallel to England's own period of domestic turmoil and revolution, it suggests that the establishment of the Exhibition might serve as a political statement about the value of stability and continuity, an admonition and example in the form of art objects during a period of internal unrest and threatened insurrection in neighboring states.

The elevation of the everyday rug or vase into aesthetic object was thus a political act, one that not only contributed to the already vexed opposition understood to exist between accounts of superior and degraded colonized peoples, but one that also recognized the symbolic potential of the object itself. Both the Museum and the swadeshi movement shared an interest

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in the value of traditional artisanal methods as a form of resistance to industrialization's mechanized production process – and both curators and nationalists understood, as Hoffenberg has suggested, the power of display. Yet where they parted ways was in the role they envisioned for the public in the object's consumption. Carefully cleansed of any emancipatory associations that Ruskin's rhetoric might have lent them, these objects occupied the controlled aesthetic spaces of the exhibition hall. Meanwhile, outside – in the streets, homes, and markets of India's cities – their everyday counterparts were coming to realize their potential as truly "revolutionary ornaments" in the hands of artisans and native consumers.

NOTES

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1. See, for instance, Hendley's *Notes on Jeypore* and Beg's *Guide to Lucknow*.
2. What was once known at the "Mutiny" of 1857 has rightly received numerous renamings in recent years, with alternatives such as "Sepoy Rebellion" and "First War of Independence" gaining currency in scholarly work. My article will use the simpler and relatively neutral "Rebellion" to refer to these events.
3. See, for example, Breckenridge; Cohn; Driver and Ashmore; Hoffenberg (2–3); Kriegel ("Narrating the Subcontinent"); and Richards (14–17).
4. Metcalf argues that the British generally understood the Saracenic, Western elements as modernizing antidotes, literally and culturally elevating the traditionally low, flat-roofed structures of India (*Imperial Vision* 57–58).
5. Tillotson provides a detailed history of the Museum's development from the time of the Prince's visit in 1876 to the Museum's opening in 1887.
6. Tillotson's reading of these efforts in Jaipur thus aligns with Tarapor's account of John Lockwood Kipling's curatorial work at the Lahore Museum as anti-imperialist in spirit.
7. Young argues that the Great Exhibition reinforced imperial hierarchies and narratives of progress (11–13), while Kriegel emphasizes the fundamental disagreements among viewers, some of whom praised India's non-industrialized state as superior, while others criticized it as primitive and undeveloped ("Narrating the Subcontinent").
8. Ruskin, perhaps anticipating this extrapolated conclusion, warned visitors to the South Kensington Museum that, in spite of Indian art's "refined" appearance, it was a product of "bestiality . . . the work of Hell" (*The Two Paths* 7, 6).
9. Note that the "Industrial" in the title refers to the "industry," or manual labor, with which such arts were produced, rather than to the mechanistic or technological associations the word usually bore.
10. However, according to Brantlinger, he did not express Ruskin's "racist animosity towards India" (477).
11. Birdwood also used the phrase "crystallised tradition" in his earlier *Handbook* (49).
12. The second volume of *JIA* was devoted to the 1883 Jeypore Exhibition.
13. Marion Rivett-Carnac was the daughter of a prominent colonial administrator, Sir Henry Durand, and the wife of J. H. Rivett-Carnac, an officer in the Indian Civil Service (J. H. Rivett-Carnac 186–87).
14. British accounts of Indian history frequently represented it as stagnant; the South Kensington exhibits emphasized this aspect of Indian culture (Metcalf, *Imperial Vision* 147), while the Great Exhibition situated the artisan within a similarly "anachronistic space" (Kriegel, *Grand Designs* 115–16).

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15. In a similar spirit, the *Rajputana Gazetteer* repeatedly refers to the "feudal" qualities of the Rajasthani state (58–59).
16. Agra and Fatehpore Sikri are two cities in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh.
17. Translation as given in Metcalf and Metcalf 149.
18. Dhotis and saris are worn during pujah, a traditional act of devotion among practicing Hindus.
19. Quoted in Low 344, 345. Low, however, dismisses the political magnitude of swadeshi, and represents it as an economic maneuver, comparable to European protectionism in trade.
20. As Brantlinger points out, Morris was among the signatories to an open letter addressed to Birdwood on the subject of Indian art, and thus was surely familiar with his writings (Brantlinger 477).

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