





Chapter 1

On the Threshold of Renewal: A Reorganized Archaeological Survey

When Jean Philippe Vogel (1871–1958) arrived in Lahore in January 1901 to direct the archaeological activities of the Panjab, Baluchistan and Ajmir Circle, it must have felt like arriving in no-man's-land. There was no archaeological department, no office, not even a single staff member to take charge of an 800,000-square-kilometre region, almost equalling that of present Pakistan in size. More than ten years had passed since Charles J. Rodgers, the last surveyor for the region between 1886 and 1890, had been economized into oblivion, making Lahore's Central Museum the only visible witness to former archaeological activities and the Circle's wealth. To be dropped in a “desolate” environment such as this must have been as bewildering as it was challenging. Still, this was what Vogel had envisaged: a job in India to broaden his Indological scholarship. In December 1897, Vogel had successfully defended his Ph.D. thesis, *The Little Clay Cart. An Indian Drama Translated from Sanskrit and Prakrit into Dutch*, which had resulted in a temporary appointment at the Gemeente Universiteit in Amsterdam as a private teacher of Indian literature.¹ But the post did not satisfy him. Vogel's father, vice-president in the Amsterdam Court, orchestrated an escape from this situation, encouraging his son to continue his Sanskrit studies in Benares and Srinagar and explore the rich palette of Indian culture.² On 20 October 1899, Vogel started his ten-month “North India tour,” sleeping alternately in railway stations and a second-hand tent.³

While staying in Srinagar, Vogel received a telegram from the Panjab Department of Public Works at Simla, enquiring whether he was interested in the post of archaeological surveyor for the new Panjab, Baluchistan and Ajmir Circle, a temporary job for five years with a starting salary of 300 rupees. Vogel seized the opportunity.⁴ He requested for a short delay in taking up duties, left Kashmir at once and set off for the Netherlands by way of Calcutta on 28 August 1900. In just a few weeks he arranged his future Indian life and arrived—for the second time—in Bombay, on 23 December. Thanks to the renowned Hungarian-born British Sanskritist Marc Aurel Stein (1862–1943), who had brought Vogel's capacities to the attention of the Panjab Government, life had taken an interesting turn⁵ (Fig. 145).

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Fig. 5: Agra, Jama Masjid, commissioned by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1628–1658), completed in 1648.

W. Caney, 1870–1875, I. M. L. 512, albumen print, 21 x 28.5 cm.

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Fig.2: Benares, Ganges view, with the Alamgir Mosque before the wilful destruction of its minarets.

Unknown photographer, ca. 1890, gelatin printing-out paper print, 21 x 29 cm.
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A suitable man?

Was the thirty-year-old Jean Philippe Vogel the right man for the surveyorship? Ostensibly, no. Vogel lacked any kind of professional, archaeological or architectural education. He was neither well informed about conservation or restoration measures, nor had he ever been involved in excavation work. He was an enthusiastic amateur sketcher and collector of paintings, but could not design maps, plans or cross-sections and was not a particularly successful photographer either. Bearing in mind, however, that professional archaeologists were few and far between, Vogel was not a particularly surprising choice. Sanskrit scholarship in general was considered the academic cult of the hour and necessary to the study of India's epigraphic records, which constituted the much-desired foundation for a solid historical framework.

Furthermore, Vogel—tutored by the distinguished linguist Christianus Cornelis Uhlenbeck (1866–1951)—turned out to be a highly ambitious man with a strong desire to broaden his knowledge of Indian culture. He took up Sanskrit at Jaipur and later at Benares, where he studied at the Sanskrit College (Figs. 2, 6–9). He was even trained in spoken Sanskrit by a local pandit, Babu Sastri Bhawe. In fact, Vogel went on to follow in the footsteps of the Netherlands Sanskritist Hendrik Kern (1833–1917) who had studied in Benares in the 1860s.⁶ Vogel was quite satisfied with the content of his studies there, in contrast to the lessons in Srinagar, which had proved hard to be organized.

Vogel also spoke passable Hindi and he had greatly enjoyed collecting the “wise sayings” of Govind Raghu, his servant during the travels through India. The many art-historical and archaeological stops along the way to the venues of his Sanskrit study had provided him with a clear impression of the diversity of the country's predominantly religious art. Even so, he felt that most buildings were in a terrible state of decay; this in contrast to the Taj, which, in the moonlight, transformed into an “Eastern fairytale of unbelievable charm” (Fig. 38). Furthermore, Vogel's investments in his personal network had also borne fruit. He corresponded with Marc Aurel Stein and the French Sanskritist and art historian, Alfred Foucher (1865–1952).⁷

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Fig. 6: Benares, Remaining wall of the demolished Vishvanatha Temple, built by Raja Todar Mal in ca. 1585, integrated in 1669 into Aurangzeb's Jnana Vapi Mosque.

R. C. Mazumdar, ca. 1890, no. 539, collodion printing-out paper print, 21 x 29 cm.
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