



GEORG BÜHLER LECTURES

# FROM TEXT TO FIELD

## GEORG BÜHLER AND THE PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE IN LATE-NINETEENTH-CENTURY INDIA

**INDRA SENGUPTA**

*German Historical Institute London*

**WELCOME**

**Oliver Jens Schmitt** | President of the Division of Humanities and the Social Sciences of the Austrian Academy of Sciences

**Concept and moderation:**

**Hannes Fellner** | Department of Linguistics, University of Vienna

**Nina Mirnig** | Institute for the Cultural and Intellectual History, Austrian Academy of Sciences

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Focusing on Georg Bühler's reports documenting his collection of ancient Indian manuscripts during official tours in the 1860s and 70s, this lecture addresses Bühler's significant role in knowledge production on India in the nineteenth century. Historical research in the last almost three decades has shown that "Western" knowledge on India, be it produced within the formal framework of colonial rule or in the European academy, was largely text-based and focused on India's textual tradition and that this textual knowledge largely shaped colonial governance in India. In the absence of what colonial scholars and administrators described as written histories, scholarship was primarily concerned with religious, predominantly Hindu-Brahmanical, texts as sources of Indian history, even after the numismatic and epigraphic discoveries of the early decades of the nineteenth century.

Indra Sengupta will situate Bühler in a shifting field of knowledge production on India and show how, in the course of his manuscript collection tours, Bühler changed the nature of knowledge production on India – perhaps unwittingly, but with important ramifications. Two aspects of his work stand out: 1) his meticulous documentation of Kashmir's geography and his linking this with Kashmir's past during his tour of Kashmir in 1875–6; and 2) his collaboration with Indian interlocutors and his attentiveness to oral testimonies beyond the text. This latter focus on oral testimonies of living subjects, as it were, marked a shift in the way in which knowledge was produced. Bühler's tours will thus be analyzed in the context of this shift in knowledge production from the text to the field, on the cusp of new colonial knowledge enterprises such as the ethnographic surveys of 1885–91 and the impending shift in focus from textual to archaeological sources of Indian history, which the Imperial government of India under Lord Curzon would forcefully push to the foreground from the late 1890s onwards.



**Indra Sengupta** (PhD, Heidelberg University) is the Head of the India Centre at the German Historical Institute London. Until the end of 2020, she was also the Head of the Max Weber Stiftung's India Branch Office in New Delhi. Her research addresses the production and practice of knowledge on India in colonial India and Europe, the development of German Orientalism, and the practices of historical preservation in colonial India. Her current research is on history and heritage in colonial India as part of a global process of heritage-making in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She is the author of *From Salon to Discipline: State, University and Indology in Germany, 1821–1914* (2005), and edited the special issue *Memory, History, and Colonialism: Engaging with Pierre Nora in Colonial and Postcolonial*

*Contexts* (2009) and, with Daud Ali, *Knowledge Production, Pedagogy, and Institutions in Colonial India* (New York, 2011).

This event can be followed via *live stream*.

For more information and to register, please visit the current events section on the website:

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