

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK ON THE RECEPTION OF CLASSICAL ARCHITECTURE

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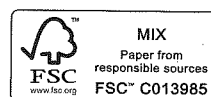
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**We dedicate this book to the memory of Dalibor Vesely
(1934–2015), inspirational teacher, architectural historian/theorist
and philosopher.**



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HERBERT BAKER, NEW DELHI AND THE RECEPTION OF THE CLASSICAL TRADITION

Soumyen Bandyopadhyay and Sagar Chauhan

Introduction

This chapter assesses the work of the British architect Sir Herbert Baker (1862–1946) for the imperial capital of New Delhi, a role he shared with Sir Edwin Lutyens (1869–1944) very much as an equal partner over more than a decade. This assessment is undertaken in the context of the reception and rereading of the classical project and the wider classical tradition among not only the imperialists, but also the colonised in India. The reception of the classical tradition in India assumed a character distinct from other British colonies as a result of a long-standing history of interaction with the classical world, as well as the sheer immensity of its diverse historical, literary and material culture traditions. With the consolidation of the British Empire in India, European classical traditions assumed attributes and resonances they did not possess in Europe.

From the late-seventeenth to the late-nineteenth century, neoclassical architecture of the towns of Madras, Calcutta, Hyderabad, Lucknow and Bombay made the classical a relatable sight to vast populations of India.¹ British colonial enterprise patterned Indian epistemology through its formulations of Indian culture, which reshaped understandings of cultural history and led to particular constructions of classical India with peaks and significant troughs. Indian ‘classical’ art and architecture – a term bestowed on subcontinental art forms by the Indologists – was evaluated against Western classical yardsticks and, in most instances, labelled secondary to it. Comparisons of Buddhist *chaitya* halls with churches and basilicas, for example, show that India was represented through classical relativity.² Fergusson went to the extent of saying that “India never reached the intellectual supremacy of Greece, or the oral greatness of Rome.”³ These descriptions declaring Indian culture and arts as secondary were necessary for the British to legitimatise their narrative, that they were governing a nation which was unable to do so itself and in the process bestowing upon its populace the more intellectual arts.⁴

Throughout British rule, Western classical traditions influenced the progression of numerous Indian art forms – carpentry, painting, music, literature and architecture. The work of the renowned Bengali poet and playwright, Michael Madhusudan Dutta (1824–73), demonstrates the reception of Graeco-Roman classics within the resurgent indigenous literary tradition of the mid-nineteenth century, and an aspiration towards a seamless syncretism.⁵ This broader classical project, which facilitated a conscious reception of the classical tradition in India, prepared

the ground for a more aware but also critical response to the eventual introduction of the design of the new capital, New Delhi.

Baker's writings and correspondence suggest the greatest reverence for the Western classical tradition. Using mainly Baker's correspondence and writings extending over several decades, now deposited as the Sir Herbert Baker Archive and Sir Herbert Baker Papers at the RIBA Study Room, V&A Museum, this chapter will argue that Baker's designs in New Delhi were attempts at capturing the humanist spirit of the classical tradition. This he did by evoking his poetic conception of classicism and its application through the key principles of organisation and deployment of ordering elements to create an architecture of rhythm and grace. We discuss his conscious evocation of classical precedents and perspective, the latter engendered by movement. The four-centred pointed arch – a nineteenth-century imperial formulation of the expression of Indian classical tradition – was negated very early on by Baker and Lutyens in favour of the round arch. This, Baker was the first to revive on a grand scale in South Africa in the early part of the twentieth century for the purposes of imperial representation.⁶

In New Delhi as well, the portico and rounded arch were deployed as classical elements. Unlike Lutyens, who favoured abstraction, Baker believed in the importance of sculpture in creating architecture of the humanist tradition. As a consequence of this, as well as a belief in the existence of other traditions which were equally capable of achieving the highest order of artistic expression, Baker's work incorporated Indian elements for local acceptability and climatic suitability.⁷ From this perspective, his intention was not necessarily the production of a cohesive architecture at New Delhi; rather, it was the exploration of key classical themes within a challenging political environment which took precedence.

According to Baker's own account, his name was first suggested as a potential architect for New Delhi by Lord Meston, to the then Viceroy of India, Lord Hardinge (1858–1944). However, Lutyens was chosen in January 1913 following domestic pressure, and the Viceroy decided to appoint Baker as a “colleague” during his visit to Delhi.⁸ Although originally friends and associates at work, Baker and Lutyens' spectacular fall-out on the issue surrounding the Processional Way in New Delhi is well-documented. In spite of this ‘Bakerloo’ breakup, their projects appear to have had precedents in each other's work, and mutual appreciation was restored in later life.

At the time of the capital's conception, many Indians sympathetic to the freedom movement rejected the idea of a New Delhi, and the native mind remained largely indifferent to its architecture.⁹ In contrast, the princely states immediately reflected adherence to the Empire and to Western classical architecture through their Delhi abodes, which were based upon the works of Sir Herbert Baker (1862–1946), Sir Edwin Lutyens (1869–1944) and their colleagues.¹⁰

Although the imperial representation of the classical, *per se*, ended in India with the overthrow of British hegemony, the classical traditions had seeped deep into Indian culture and become intrinsic. The brand of classicism expressed in New Delhi architecture was taken up freely by Indian society after Independence, as an increasing number of people considered the Western classical to be a style of affluence, and many Indian clients to this day would fancy a ‘Delhi façade.’¹¹ As Crinson notes, echoes of New Delhi could be felt even in Le Corbusier's Chandigarh, designed in the 1950s, some of which were adopted through deliberate deployment of irony, while others were implicit in the conception of the city, implanting social orders shaped by the political elite to mirror imperial Delhi and feudal, caste-based social patterns.¹²

Baker's classical humanism: Grace and rhythm

Baker's view of the classical, in essence, lay in the idea of the eternal familiarity it presented, the latent spirit of which was sustained over the ages through the intrinsic poetic tradition that lay at

the root of “our most intimate emotions,” and that guarded against soulless formalism. In a talk delivered at the RIBA, he explained, quoting the poet William Hazlitt, that the study of the classic “teaches us to believe that there is something really great and excellent in the world, surviving all the shocks of accident and fluctuations of opinions.” Classicism, for Hazlitt, developed in the human mind “a real love of excellence or a belief that any other excellence exists superior to their own.”¹³ The “eternally familiar,” Baker contends, quoting Gilbert Murray, is present both in the classic and the traditional. Murray cites the contrasting examples of Milton and Shakespeare; while Milton’s poetry is so obviously “soaked in classical tradition,” in Shakespeare’s work, “there is always this undercurrent of tradition inherited from the past.” The secret of genius lies in the ability to stir or move with tradition, which is “used for the discovery of new beauty.”¹⁴

It was this other tradition sitting alongside the classical, exemplified by the work of Shakespeare, one that is equally capable of achieving expressions of beauty of the highest order, which prompted Baker to embrace the Indian tradition within his designs in New Delhi. For Baker, *grace* is the inheritance from the past – that distilled tradition which breathes into creative work “the eternal spirit of beauty.”¹⁵ Baker quoted Shakespeare in order to question whether modernism was capable of such grace, given that truth was unattainable and beauty was boastful: “Beauty, truth and rarity/Grace in all simplicity.”¹⁶ In his letter to the New York architect William Adams Delano, Baker clarifies the importance of the poetic in his conception of art:

In art I generally think in terms of poetry; the ideas or principles are the same though the medium varies in each art; without the high spirituality which is in the best poetry, and that mysterious thing rhythm, our works may be of little worth.¹⁷

Rhythm, for Baker, is the mystery and secret of art; in architecture, he suggests, “the magic lies in simple elements, repetition, symmetry, contrasts of void and surface and such elemental things that make the rhythmic beauty.”¹⁸ By being poetic, Baker, following Tonks, meant adherence to the “spiritual side of life,” which he felt great art should strive to achieve.¹⁹ “You ought to have been a poet,” Lutyens wrote to Baker in early 1942,

I think, perhaps, it is your poetry that inspires your work. My school is that poetry should be inspired by the work done ... The first blow you gave me was your perspective of the Delhi Building when you showed the domes within the towers instead of as designed with the towers inside the domes.²⁰

Lutyens sketched out the proposal of “the poet,” distinguishing it from that of “the builder,” and mentioning that the “poet wins in the charm of his expression.”²¹

Baker was a strong believer in the humanist tradition. For him it meant “art as expressive of Life” and not “Art for Art’s sake,” as he recorded in a confidential note dated 17 January 1944, on the work of Lutyens. While acknowledging the greatness of Lutyens as an architect, and the heroic qualities he brought to the practice of this discipline, Baker found Lutyens’ work “abstract, geometrical, Olympian ... careless, even regardless of mankind,” far removed from the main concerning sentiments of life. Echoing a comment by a critic in the magazine *Country Life*, he too thought that abstraction was “inhuman.” However, he was more concerned with the reaction such inhuman architecture would introduce in the form of stale functionalism (Baker uses the term “functionism”), devoid of the spirit of the humanistic tradition.²² Such a reaction, resulting in stereotyped “spiritless formalism,” Baker contends, was also the downfall of classicism in the early nineteenth century, resulting in such reactionary developments as the introduction of romanticism, the Gothic style and the plethora of mimics of the classical that

dominated the century.²³ Wilful playing with blank screen walls, holding behind them sunless, top-lit servants' rooms, an example of Lutyens' many brilliant formal architectural devices, was not worthy of praise in Baker's view, as it merely fuelled the reactionary tendency of formalism.²⁴ Lutyens' Thiepval Memorial for the missing of the Somme (1928–32),²⁵ though undoubtedly immensely grand and playful with its abstraction of the 'mass' in his 'Elemental Mode' – it could be argued – does not have the subtlety of Baker's abstracted classicism at Cité and Dantzig cemeteries.²⁶ In humanism, therefore, lie the roots of Baker's interest in achieving climatic comfort for the inhabitants, as well as his keen interest in sculpture enhancing architecture – “the most allied art to architecture.”²⁷

Classical organisation: Acropolis and the Processional Way

In a joint letter written in March 1913 to the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge of Penshurst (viceregal tenure 1910–16), Lutyens and Baker proposed moving back the Secretariats and the Government House up Raisina Hill by about 400 yards,²⁸ suggesting that raising the buildings on a platform about thirty feet high would provide the ensemble with “an air of quiet and privilege” (Figure 16.1).²⁹ Mindful of the intended legacy of these buildings, and the lasting impact these were expected to make on the Indian people, they cited successful classical examples of cities raised upon an eminence, “such as those of the old Greek cities and the Capitol at Rome.”³⁰ This small increase is suggested as a compromise between the flat cities on the Indian plains and acropolis-type classical precedents, which would still allow the complex to survey the ancient cities and “follow the spirit of the old buildings” from Delhi's past.³¹ A reminder of Alberti's attempt at surveying the city of Rome (*Forma Urbis Romæ*) from the Capitoline Hill, it presents a suggestion of a non-homogeneous assessment of the old city that lay beyond, giving prominence to a selection of buildings and structures from the past as urban fragments.

The issue of precisely how the raising of the complex would enhance views both from and up to it introduces a perspectival discussion. The architects argue that the enhanced proximity between Government House and the Secretariats would increase the angle of vision by about 700 yards and allow a view of the old city walls. The twenty-foot height difference between the cornices would place Government House in a position of “impressive” visual dominance on approach, being now clearly flanked by two instead of the four secretariat blocks originally proposed, and further enhanced by the inclined access – the Processional Way – with the possible introduction of a sloped piazza³² and a second flight of steps up to the Government House.³³ It is further suggested that a “Durbar amphitheatre” be quarried out of the rocky ridge to

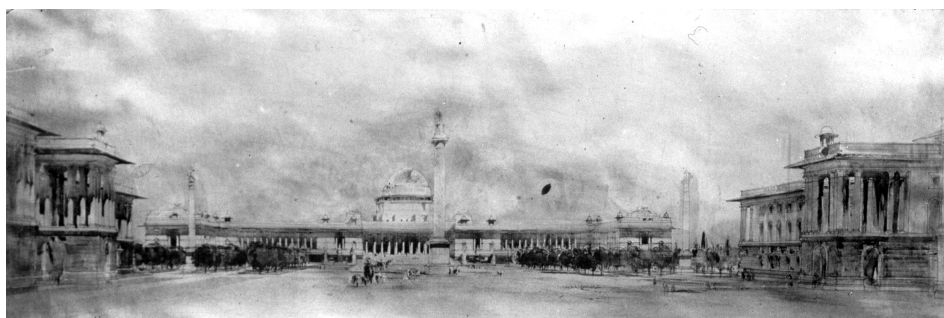


Figure 16.1 The Viceroy's House from the Great Place, flanked by the Secretariats, New Delhi. Watercolour by William Walcot.



Figure 16.2 The ascending Processional Way with the Secretariat (North Block), New Delhi by Herbert Baker.

enhance this prominence, which, Lutyens and Baker argue, “would appeal to the imagination and leave a record of the British rule, even more permanent than the buildings of the new city.”³⁴

As disagreements between Baker and Lutyens grew over the Processional Way through the spring and summer of 1916, the classical precedents, as well as the perspective, played increasingly important roles in Baker’s argument. In his letter to the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford (1916–21) on 24 March 1916, Baker points out that the idea of siting the Secretariats and Government House at the ridge of the Raisina Hills was to create an elevated, privileged location, the Great Place a “capitol, ['] ‘acropolis’ or platform not dissimilar from that on which Darius built his Palace at Persepolis.”³⁵ The two Secretariats in the accepted scheme were to form the propylaea, as it were, to the Parthenon, Government House,³⁶ accessed by the “Via Sacra,” the Processional Way.³⁷ In commenting on the gradient of the Processional Way (1:22), which Lutyens had complained was obstructing the unrestricted view of Government House, Baker cited the Capitol in Rome and the Acropolis in Athens, which were both accessible by steep steps that hid the structures during ascent (Figure 16.2).³⁸

The 1:22 gradient, which cut into the courtyard between the two Secretariats somewhat, nevertheless left an uninterrupted central space between them – necessary, as Baker felt, for their smooth functioning.³⁹ Thus set, the Processional Way presented a short disappearance of Government House on the incline before making a dramatic reappearance and suggested a perspective that unfolded with movement. The alternative proposed by Lutyens, of making the ramp cut deeper into the courtyard,⁴⁰ as well as his earlier criticism directed at widening the vista from Government House,⁴¹ Baker feared would sever the courtyard, rendering the Secretariat blocks invisible for the entire length of the Processional Way, and would leave only Government House in view throughout.⁴² In an earlier letter to Mr C. Hill on 18 March 1916, Baker had already iterated this perspectival problem:

So much might be said for historical example. In the Capitol of Rome, Michelangelo’s great central building is not seen as you climb the steps leading to the court. It appears in all its beauty as you reach the top. In the Acropolis, the Parthenon which dominates

all Athens is completely out of sight as you climb the steps to the Propylea [sic], and the group of buildings and monuments bursts upon the sight as you pass through these buildings, and in the mystery of this lies some of the beauty of the Acropolis. The Acropolis' idea may have been wrong in the first instance, but now that it is there, it seems in my humble opinion little short of madness to bisect it throughout its length with a deep cutting, or to cut it away with a multitude of steps.⁴³

Perhaps, extending beyond the influences of the classical and the Renaissance, one finds a continued interest in the baroque treatment of civic space in Baker's conception of Delhi, as Charles Reilly had also noted in the design for the Union Buildings in Pretoria (Figure 16.3).⁴⁴ There, the great sweep of the ionic colonnade, ending in propylaea-like porticos at either end, overlooks the plain below, creating a vast amphitheatre. Elevated positioning of such significant buildings was important to Baker, as he noted, for example, that

[t]he Theseus at Athens, a temple almost complete at this day, which was built at the same time and with the same skill as the Parthenon, fails, because it is placed on an insignificant site below the hill, to attract the art worshippers who flock up to the Parthenon.⁴⁵

Thus, New Delhi was indeed "envisioned as a modern outpost of Rome, with nods in the direction of the Acropolis and Persepolis," as Crinson notes. The architectural language, as we shall



Figure 16.3 Union Buildings, Pretoria by Herbert Baker.

now see, was classical, through which Baker, Lutyens and their collaborators laid claim to the creation of a “humanist and universal” city.⁴⁶

Classical elements: From porticos and colonnades to round arches and mass

Porticos flanking a recessed loggia – much like the propylaea to the Acropolis, held up by a trabeated construction of Doric columns – also feature in the symmetrical organisation of the memorial to Cecil Rhodes in Cape Town (c. 1912), set against the mountain backdrop, raised above the plain and accessed via four sets of steps (Figure 16.4).⁴⁷ At New Delhi, the propylaea is further strengthened by symmetrically disposed paired porticos, supported by a forest of Ionic columns.

Aside from the porticos for the Secretariats, Baker deployed the colonnade only at the Council Chamber (now the Parliament Building), where the convex curve of the colonnade with a more ‘Indianised’ capital, using a lotus petal motif, surrounds the chambers and offices providing a deep veranda (Figure 16.5). This baroque form of the circular Council House, while consistent with the intentions of Lutyens’ urban layout, was not the original design he had proposed, which had to be discarded under pressure from “Keeling and Lutyens.”⁴⁸

Baker’s interest in classicism had begun in 1892, the year he went to South Africa and met with Cecil Rhodes within a few months of his arrival there.⁴⁹ Baker considered the “column, lintel, plain wall surfaces and unbroken horizontal lines” to be the classical elements that fascinated him.⁵⁰ Alongside these features of the classical, the aspect of “traditional construction and craftsmanship,” underpinned by the Arts and Crafts tradition, defined a considerable part of Baker’s design language throughout his career.⁵¹ The latter also contributed towards a somewhat more sympathetic acceptance of traditional Indian craftsmanship in Delhi. His Honoured Dead Memorial in Kimberley (c. 1904)⁵² preceded Lutyens’ attempt at the classical, the villa Heathcote in Ilkley (c. 1908). This memorial and other works of Baker in South Africa demonstrated a style

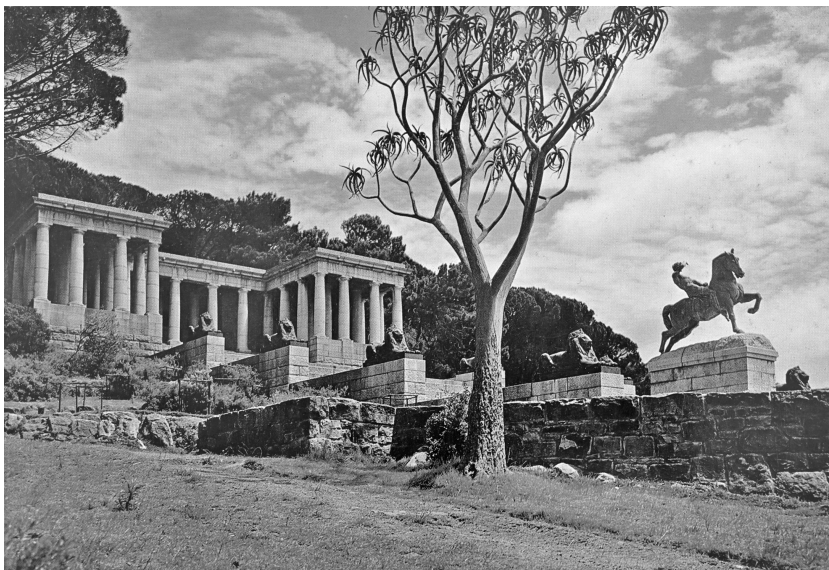


Figure 16.4 Rhodes Memorial, Cape Town by Herbert Baker. Postcard.



Figure 16.5 Council House (now Parliament Building) and the Princes' Porch, New Delhi by Herbert Baker.

of stripped or abstracted classicism at the turn of the twentieth century, in contrast to Lutyens' neoclassical designs of the same time, the latter replete with ornamentation. Later, however, it would be Lutyens who adopted the abstracted approach, which, as already mentioned, Baker found difficult to understand.

Baker appreciated the classical Greek architecture and featured elements from it in his designs:

The essence of Greek art is the simplicity and the grandeur of the treatment of mass, combined with the beauty of the detail and sculpture...I believe of the subtlety and refinement of the curves of Parthenon. Athens also teaches us how much in architecture depends on the quality and texture of the material. I know nothing more attractive than the white marble of the temples of the Acropolis, bleached by sun and rain, and blushing into gold, which is the peculiar property of the marble from Mount Pentelicus.⁵³

The Council Chambers aside, Baker himself largely avoided – and, it would appear, also persuaded Lutyens to avoid – the continual veranda in favour of “adopting the principle of thick walls and shutters.”⁵⁴ Baker wrote to Keeling:

A bold departure from Indian architecture has been taken in the planning and designing of the Secretariat by the omission of continuous *verandahs* to protect the walls from

the sun ... On the other hand, experiments were made to prove that a very thick or hollow wall does not get heated right through even in the fiercest season.⁵⁵

To retain the uninterrupted grandeur of the mass, and, in the absence of the colonnade, to establish a regular rhythm across the façade, Baker introduced hollow (cavity) walls with a deep, projected cornice on a slight incline, known as the *chajja* in Mughal and north Indian architecture.⁵⁶ Such projected devices also featured over recessed windows on the ground floor, as well as larger openings on floors above.⁵⁷

While sympathetic to the incorporation of Indian decorative elements, Baker's classical mindset would continue to worry about their articulation and their compatibility with the classical order and rhythm he aimed to achieve in the Secretariat façades:

I send a jaali [screen]. I am worrying rather over some of the details. The emblem especially – the angle treatment – my fault I know. I hope to change [a sketch] with George[']s forbearance ... This will be better [another sketch].

I was rather horrified to see a suggested detail for the brackets of the ground floor windows [a sketch] dreadful hindo [Hindu] stuff. Who could have done it and how could you have passed it! Do never let such stuff be done again.⁵⁸

In this correspondence, Baker mentions his liking for the “flat lotus discs” on lintel soffits at the “Qutb” (Qutab complex), and how he particularly liked certain features such as those under the lintels and the inscriptions around the pointed-arched entranceways of the Mughals.⁵⁹

On Saturday 15 March 1913, Baker and Lutyens showed the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, around the Qutab complex in south Delhi, “to show him all over” a collection of historically significant monuments dating back to the Delhi Sultanate period from the late-twelfth century, and now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.⁶⁰ “He wants the pointed and tilted arches – like this,” Baker writes, sketching out the four-centred pointed arch prevalent in the Mughal and Islamic architecture of India.⁶¹ The Viceroy had expressed his preference for the use of the pointed arch in New Delhi, realising through his long stay in the ‘East’ that the Indian psyche understood well the symbolism of the pointed arch, while the round arch for them was meaningless; “[n]othing can be more prosaic, commonplace and out of place in India than the round arch,” he had observed (Figure 16.6).

“I cannot think why you hanker so much after the round arch,” wrote Lord Hardinge to Lutyens, citing the fine elegance of the pointed-arched ground floor colonnade at the Palazzo Ducale (Doge's Palace) in Venice, and noting at the same time Baker's employment of the round-arched arcade in Pretoria.⁶² He went on to state:

What I want to see in Delhi is a fine and broad style of architecture with Indian tradition and sentiment running throughout. By this I mean buildings that will be admired by Europeans for their breadth of treatment, and that will at the same time appeal to Indians for their interpretation of Indian sentiment. This may be difficult to achieve, but it is, I maintain, the goal that should be set before us at Delhi.⁶³

At Qutab they discussed with Lord Hardinge the strengths and weaknesses of Hindu and Mughal architecture. Baker and Lutyens concluded that the corbelling technique the Hindu craftsmen had used (instead of radiating voussoirs) to construct these first Islamic edifices in Delhi in the twelfth century (predating Mughal rule by over 300 years) was a “crude” and “meaningless” method,⁶⁴ which was originally derived from knowledge of creating supporting brackets for

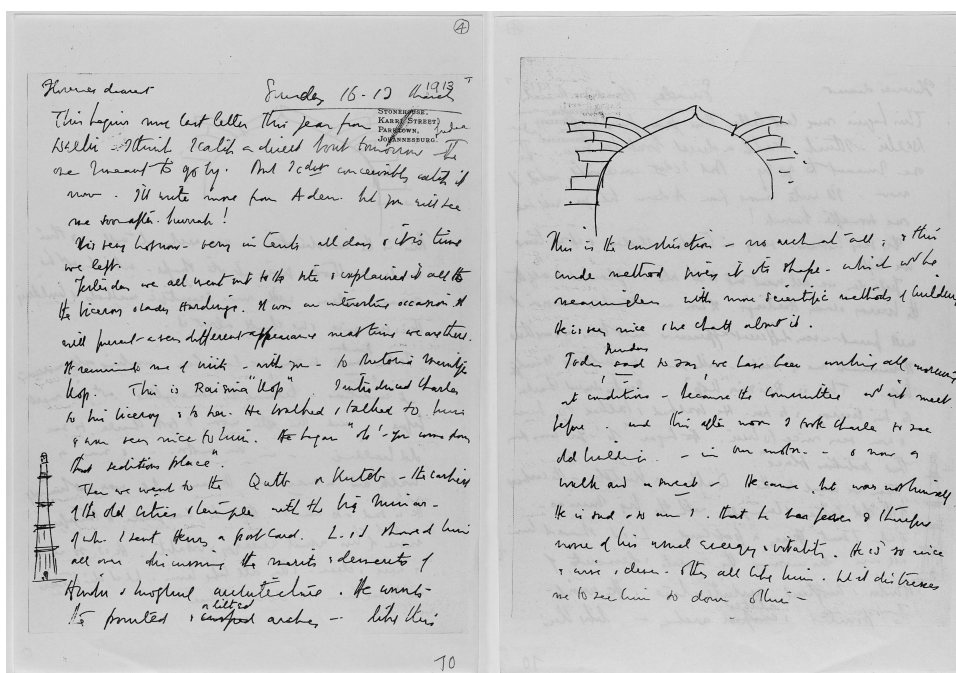


Figure 16.6 Baker's letter to his wife, Florence Baker, 16 March, 1913, on his visit to the Qutab complex.

lintels and beams within a largely trabeated temple construction system. The two architects were convinced that the four-centred, pointed arch of Islamic origin "was not in accordance with the ordered geometry inherent in the great architecture, which ... would best give expression to the British Government of India."⁶⁵ Behind the criticism of the "crude" and untruthful Indian method and the unwillingness to accept the elegance of the Venetian palace lay an obvious reference to the ordered classical tradition both were keen to implant at New Delhi, which, Baker felt, had been lost in the early nineteenth century leading to the revival of the Gothic. Eventually, the Viceroy relented, agreeing that the imperial architecture should be based on the semi-circular arch,⁶⁶ and Baker was of the view that it was his "reasoned arguments," rather than Lutyens' "ridicule," that won them the battle.⁶⁷

Thus, Baker progressed in his classical journey to the deployment of round arches in Delhi. Decades later, he would record a poetic admiration of the arches and vaults of the Temple of Janus, suggesting that it was "the vault of heaven" and "the origin of the Triumphal Arch of Roman and all architecture." Baker went on to say that, "[t]he French in the Arc de Triomphe have since the war added to the arch-symbol a greater glory."⁶⁸ This appreciation of the triumphal arch from the Temple of Janus was eventually manifested in the grand 'mihrabs' or recessed porticos, one of the most prominent expressions in Baker's Delhi Secretariats, which resonated with the Mughal architectural device deployed at entrances (Figure 16.7). Baker believed in the simplicity of classical geometric shapes:

Wren ... emphasizes the point that the simpler geometrical shapes are the best; and indeed the true circle is the basis of his and the best classical structural design, consisting of combinations of arches, barrel and domical vaults and domes.⁶⁹



Figure 16.7 Rhythm and symmetry of the Secretariat (North Block), New Delhi by Herbert Baker.

Roughly contemporaneously with the Secretariat, Baker also introduced the glory of the round arch in his designs for Cité Bonjean Military Cemetery (started 1914) and Dantzig Alley British Cemetery (1916–18), for instance. Both these cemeteries and memorials in France, with their use of the round arch, unbroken horizontal stone bands and unadorned brick surfaces, were created around the same time as Lutyens' designs for several war cemeteries and memorials. This style would later become integral to the design style of a number of architects of the Indo-British School of Architecture in New Delhi.

At the Secretariats, Baker proposed inscriptional adornments to the *mihrab*-type recessed porticos, as well as for arches within the Great Hall and the courts. These, he proposed, would be in a range of languages – Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit – creating either a rectilinear or circular frame around the arches (Figure 16.8).⁷⁰ In the decorative elements, Lanchester saw a device to harmonise the European design imports with the Indian tradition, in a “classic manner endowed with a Gothic freedom.”⁷¹ While the design at New Delhi, Lanchester summarised, was largely “European in type,” since “the massing, proportion, and much of the detail follow European precedents,” leading to the achievement of a consistent and cohesive ensemble, it was “qualified by combination with features prescribed by climatic conditions.”⁷² Baker saw the classical devices of “inscriptions and heraldry, symbolism, sculpture and painting” as key to achieving this synergy, and was later critical of Lutyens for ignoring their role in his designs.⁷³

The use of such decorative elements and close engagement with the crafting of these were, at the time of the design of New Delhi, part of Baker's emerging concern for the role of sculpture within classical architecture, as well as a commitment, he claimed, to a humanist tradition. In correspondence with D.Y. Cameron in 1943, he quotes A.K. Lawrence:

Architecture is the mother of them all; monumental sculpture and mural painting, dependant arts, are one indivisibly [*sic*] with architecture – to heighten and enrich its purpose, to breathe life of another kind into it and in so doing come to life themselves.⁷⁴

For Baker, architecture provided the setting for painting and sculpture to exist, which they could not do independently, he claimed.⁷⁵ Baker lamented the absence of interest in sculpture in



Figure 16.8 Nashiman/recessed portal of the Secretariat, New Delhi. Watercolour by William Walcot.

Lutyens' work; citing Thiepval, he felt the inclusion of sculpture would have better justified the "crude" angled geometry of the platforms and created a more beautiful and "human" expression of the building.⁷⁶ Sculptural elements mainly drawn from a range of Indian traditions were proposed, from the urban scale (e.g., Asokan pillars) to the scale of architectural elements (e.g., screens and decorations in bas relief), which would foreground a certain legible symbolism to aid reception of the classical city. Significant architectural elements – such as the design for the Prince's Porch for the Council Chambers – would fall within this category of sculptural insertions, which were not necessarily congruous with classical organisation and order.

Epilogue: Baker's legacy and wider reception

The fascination with classicism established common ground among Baker, Lutyens and the Indo-British School of Architecture, particularly Walter Sykes George (1888–1962), Arthur Gordon Shoosmith (1888–1974) and Henry Alexander Nesbitt Medd (1892–1977).⁷⁷ Baker, an imperialist,⁷⁸ and the first of these to adopt the classical approach, moulded his architecture in representation of the Empire.

Thus, the round arch and simple geometric shapes of the classical found expression in Delhi. George featured the round arch amply, and it found admiration in the words of Shoosmith as he praised the Viceroy's House, where "the eye roams outwards through the arches as it climbs into the space above."⁷⁹ Undoubtedly, George, Shoosmith and Medd were inspired more by Lutyens than Baker, and this can be testified through their archives. Medd went to the extent of

creating a small-scale Viceroy's House for the Nagpur High Court. The architecture of George and Shoosmith went beyond the grafting of Indian features onto the classical. George's language of unbroken brick surfaces and continuous horizontal bands at Kashmir House (1927–29) and St. Thomas Church (1931–32) bridged well the classical and the Indian character (Figure 16.9). These projects echo Lutyens' abstraction of masses in the 'elemental' mode,⁸⁰ and Baker's responses to Indian climate in the planning of the Secretariats, where, as mentioned before, he had omitted continuous verandas to protect the walls from the sun and utilised very thick walls instead.⁸¹

George presented a cohesive progression of classicism into modernism as he simultaneously abstracted mass and highlighted planes. This was perhaps Baker's influence, under whom he had learnt how to master "mass, line and proportion."⁸² The Secretariats highlighted the horizontal plane in deep burnt-rhubarb sandstone, an emphasis prominent throughout George's designs. These treatments are in contrast to Lutyens' architecture, which accentuated mass better than planes. Shoosmith's approach at St Martins Garrison Church (c. 1931) is an excellent example of this accentuation and use of classical proportions.⁸³ George and Shoosmith created a modern Indian visual *sans ornamentation*, which paralleled Baker's understanding of Indian buildings:

The characteristics which are most pleasing ... in the old building of India are the wide, flat spaces of bare, sunlit walls, contrasted and enriched at rare intervals with the most elaborate features of doors, windows and balconies.⁸⁴



Figure 16.9 The front façade of Kashmir House, New Delhi by Walter Sykes George.

Lutyens rejected modernism, while Shoosmith, George and even Baker – to some extent – welcomed it⁸⁵ (Figure 16.10). What Baker disapproved of was the eccentricity of modernism, but he felt that once the dust of euphoria had settled, there would be something to be gained from it.⁸⁶ He appreciated the “great scope for adventure and originality in use of concrete for buildings, its thinness and its power to cantilever.”⁸⁷ George and Shoosmith understood the potential of concrete better, advocating an architecture without overt classical forms and thus championing a modernism of restraint,⁸⁸ while Baker advocated new forms for new materials and believed that classical proportion, symmetry and rhythm should be able to absorb modernism.⁸⁹ However, he also believed that there was no such thing as originality. On the design of New Delhi, he wrote “there must be no conscious straining after invention or originality ... there must be good building and a frank acceptance of modern methods and materials.”⁹⁰ By employing modern acoustics for the Council Chambers, he attempted to achieve the synergy between “arts et scientia.”⁹¹

The domes of the three Council Chambers incorporating scenes from Indian mythology by Fyzee Rahamin achieved a synthesis of Western and Indian arts, and anticipated approaches taken by Le Corbusier decades later in Chandigarh. Baker’s belief in the centrality of the classical and Western methods however also led him to lament: “Are Indian painters never to be taught perspective and chiaroscuro and a sense of atmosphere and impressionism nor the Indian Craftsmen how properly to build an arch?”⁹² The Fyzee paintings, interestingly, combined the subtle floating quality of impressionism and the figure outlines of Bagh and Ajanta cave paintings.⁹³ The British newspapers of the time reported extensively on the modern Indian art of the Council Chambers, implying the union of Indians and British, though the reality was starkly different.⁹⁴



Figure 16.10 St. Martin's Garrison Church, New Delhi by Arthur Shoosmith.

Indians were mostly indifferent to the prospect of a new capital and did not have much say in either the design of the city or its architecture.⁹⁵ Several newspapers reported on the shortcomings of the designs and the exaggerated finances.⁹⁶ Freedom fighters, as well as Gandhi and Nehru, rejected the Raisina buildings. Gandhi labelled Delhi a “waste of money on architectural piles.”⁹⁷ Tillotson presents the contrasting view that “British architectural policy in India had ensured that Indians were more likely to admire Western than Indian styles.”⁹⁸ Unfortunately, there is little to no information on how the layman received the New Delhi architecture at the time. It was either the princely states or the Anglo-Indian architects who had made ‘Delhi classical’ a commonplace before Independence in 1947. The princes made no effort to showcase their native architecture and associated themselves with the style of the Raj.⁹⁹ Lutyens’ designs for Hyderabad House (c. 1928) and Baroda House (c. 1928) appropriated the classical for the princes’ abodes in Delhi. George employed the round arch and the emphasis on the horizontal at Jind House (c. 1933) and Bahawalpur House (c. 1939),¹⁰⁰ while his reproductions of Lutyens’ abstracted Buddhist dome at Bahawalpur and Mandi House advanced Raisina architecture. George’s first housing project, Sujjan Singh Park (1942–5), integrated the Secretariat’s ‘*mihrab*’ with art-deco. The round arches in the plastered surfaces at Lodi Housing Colony (1947) furthered this synthesis and established a language for the housing architecture of the late-1940s and the 1950s. At St Stephens College (1941) and Miranda College (1948), he coupled the modernist brick visual with classical and Indian elements of round arch, rhythm, *verandahs*, *jharokhas*, *chajjas* and *jalīs*, a style followed by several colleagues for other buildings at Delhi University.¹⁰¹

Baker’s classicism at New Delhi had followed a broad humanistic tradition, evoked Greek and Roman precedents and incorporated elements of the so-called Indian classical. Not unlike other British architects of the time, he would also consider Indian architecture to be secondary, and many of its features to be redundant, crude or dreadful. Though not as outright in his criticism of Indian architecture as Lutyens was, he nevertheless believed in the betterment of Indian arts under British rule. The classical elements he had inculcated in South Africa – porticos and colonnades – were employed in Delhi, and new elements such as the round arch and solid façades were added, many of which continue to form part of a popular – and now even vernacular – ‘Delhi style.’

Notes

- 1 The architecture of British residencies, churches and imperial infrastructures in the mentioned towns was largely classically inspired, interspersed, of course, with the evolved Indo-Saracenic style of architecture. See Andreas Volwahn, *Splendours of Imperial India: British Architecture in the 18th and 19th Centuries* (London: Prestel, 2004), 41–125; Sten Nilsson, *European Architecture in India 1750–1850* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 25–31; and Philip Davies, *Splendours of the Raj: British Architecture in India, 1660–1947* (Frome and London: Butler and Tanner, 1987), 17–102.
- 2 Vimalin Rujivacharakul, H. Hazel Hahn, Ken Tadashi Oshima and Peter Christensen (eds.), *Architecturalized Asia: Mapping a Continent through History* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013), 140, 139–55.
- 3 James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture: Vol. I* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1972), 4.
- 4 Herbert Baker, *Architecture and Personalities* (London and Aylesbury: Hazell, Watson and Viney Ltd, 1944), 63.
- 5 See, for example, Alexander Riddiford, *Madly After the Muses: Bengali Poet Michael Madhusudan Datta and his Reception of the Graeco-Roman Classics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- 6 Thomas R. Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain’s Raj* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 247.

- 7 Baker was of the opinion that “Climate must always dominate the style in architecture.”
Herbert Baker, “Salisbury Cathedral,” August 1927, RIBA Study Room at the V&A, Sir Herbert Baker Archive, BaH/64/2, 2, and Herbert Baker, “Architecture and Education,” paper read before the Teachers Congress at Johannesburg, July 1902, BaH/64/2, 4.
- 8 Herbert Baker, “Edwin Lutyens: Thoughts prompted by the Country Life article of January 14th 1944,” unpublished notes, 17 January 1944, RIBA Study Room at the V&A, Sir Herbert Baker Archive, BaH/64/5, 1–2.
- 9 Sir Percival Phillips, “The Troubles of New Delhi,” *Daily Mail*, 9 February 1926. He mentions that the native mind was only languidly interested in the problems of the slope and view of the Viceroy’s House, which Lutyens considered of paramount importance.
- 10 Sumanta K. Bhowmick, *Princely Palaces in New Delhi* (Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2016), 84, 195, 201–9.
- 11 The Delhi façade with the symbol of a *verandah* or portico, which was typical of all buildings of New Delhi during its construction.
- 12 Mark Crinson, *Modern Architecture and the End of Empire* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003), 13.
- 13 Herbert Baker, “Tradition in Architecture,” transcript of a talk delivered at the RIBA as an attachment with a letter to William Adams Delano, 1 April 1940, RIBA Study Room at the V&A, Sir Herbert Baker Papers, BaH/5/31.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Baker quotes William Shakespeare’s *The Phoenix and the Turtle* in a letter to Charles Madge, where he is similarly critical of Modernists. In another letter to Delano, he is critical of the RIBA awarding the gold medal to Frank Lloyd Wright, in whose work he saw “no designed beauty in architecture.” Letter, Herbert Baker to Charles Madge, 21 February 1941, RIBA Study Room at the V&A, Sir Herbert Baker Papers, BaH/5/19; and letter, Baker to Delano, 7 February 1940, BaH/5/31.
- 17 Letter, Baker to Delano, 1 April 1940, BaH/5/31.
- 18 Letter, Baker to Madge, 28 February 1941, BaH/5/19.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Letter, Edwin Lutyens to Herbert Baker, 28 January 1942, RIBA Study Room at the V&A, Sir Herbert Baker Papers, BaH/1/10/24(iv) and BaH/1/10/24(ii).
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Herbert Baker, “Edwin Lutyens: Thoughts prompted,” 1–2.
- 23 Baker, “Tradition in Architecture.”
- 24 Baker, “Edwin Lutyens: Thoughts prompted,” 2.
- 25 On Thiepval, Baker commented that it was “a play on geometrical voids and masses, with no thought of the sentiment of the war cemetery; look at the little graves below in the picture. It does not appeal to soldiers who fought or those who lost comrades and relations there.” Ibid.
- 26 Another cemetery designed by Baker around the same time, Peronne Road Cemetery (1916–19), presents a similar material language but more Greek construction. Several of his other cemetery designs feature the round arch in the entrance portals, such as at the Ration Farm Military Cemetery, Courcellette British Cemetery and the Caterpillar Valley Cemetery, to name a few. Lutyens designed several cemeteries around the same time period as Baker.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 The site was in the area of the old village of Raisina, and the hill-like appearance was created as a result of the existence of brickfields which had been in use since the days of the fifth Mughal emperor, Shah Jahan (1592–1666), who had created the earlier city in Delhi, Shahjahanabad (now Old Delhi). Sir Alexander Rouse, “New Delhi,” *Indian State Railways Magazine* 4, 5 (1931): 372.
- 29 Joint letter, Lutyens and Baker to Lord Hardinge, 8 March 1913, RIBA Study Room at the V&A, Sir Herbert Baker Papers, BaH/2/1/1(ii).
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 This was later discarded, as it would appear from Baker’s subsequent letters, to ensure irrigation of the lawns, which would have required a flat topography. Also see Baker’s letter to Lutyens, “I wonder at your suggesting ‘slopes.’ Grass would never grow on them in India, where irrigation is necessary, and what useless places they would be where nothing would grow and no one could walk.” Letter, Herbert Baker to Lord Chelmsford, 24 March 1916, RIBA Study Room at the V&A, Sir Herbert Baker Papers, BaH/2/1/16(i); letter, Herbert Baker to Edwin Lutyens, 3 May 1916, BaH/2/1/20(i).
- 33 Joint letter, Lutyens and Baker to Hardinge, BaH/2/1/1(ii and iii).

- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Baker to Chelmsford, BaH/2/1/16 (i). This typewritten document is a copy of a draft containing Baker's corrections, prepared during his passage from Bombay to Aden on 24 March 1916. It is thus possible that the final version sent to the Viceroy may have differed slightly.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Baker to Chelmsford, BaH/2/1/16 (iii).
- 38 Baker to Chelmsford, BaH/2/1/16 (ii).
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Baker to Chelmsford, BaH/2/1/16 (iv).
- 42 Baker responds to Lutyens regarding the perspective view: "No alteration to Government Court and the road could materially affect the view of Government House on the Perspective." Baker to Chelmsford, BaH/2/1/16 (ii and iii); Baker to Lutyens, BaH/2/1/20(i).
- 43 Letter, Herbert Baker to C. Hill, 18 March 1916, RIBA Study Room at the V&A, Sir Herbert Baker Papers, BaH/2/1/11(ii).
- 44 Charles H. Reilly, "Modern Architecture in South Africa," *Country Life* (15 November 1924): 756.
- 45 Herbert Baker, "Style in Architecture in relation to building problems in South Africa," *South African Journal of Science* (Aug. 1910): 393.
- 46 Mark Crinson, *Modern Architecture and the End of Empire*, 11.
- 47 Ibid., plate on p. 759. Here Baker introduced symbolism: the forty-nine steps represented the years of Cecil Rhodes' life. See John Muir, *Walking Cape Town: Urban Walks and Drives in the Cape Peninsula* (South Africa: Random House Struik, 2013).
- 48 One of the original ideas was a triangular organisation, which Baker evidently favoured, as he reminisces later: "I still think, looking again at the sketches, that the design on the triangular basis from the recesses of which the low dome would be seen, would have been more beautiful and more in harmony and scale with the other Capital Buildings, than the third design I made with the huge colonnade, the present Council Chamber, as it is called I think. But it is a very good plan no doubt, and a most fascinating scheme of a building. Yet I shall always regret that instead of the low dome revealed the present central dome is, as must be, concealed by outside colonnade and its attic." Letter, Herbert Baker to Henry Medd, 3 April 1940, RIBA Study Room at the V&A, Sir Herbert Baker Papers, BaH/68/1.
- 49 Dennis Radford, "Sir Herbert Baker," *Parktown Westcliff Heritage Trust* (September 1992), RIBA Portland Place, London, Herbert Baker Biographical File.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Baker, "Architecture and Education," 2, 4.
- 52 Dedicated to the people who died defending the city during the Siege of Kimberley during the Anglo-Boer war.
- 53 Baker, "Style in Architecture."
- 54 Herbert Baker, "Copy" (for personal record) of the overview of the collaboration with Lutyens on Delhi, states the controversies surrounding the design of the government complex from Baker's perspective. Herbert Baker, "Copy," personal record, March 1921, BaH/2/2/30(vii).
- 55 Letter, Herbert Baker to H. Keeling, January 1923, RIBA Study Room at the V&A, Sir Herbert Baker Papers, BaH/61/1.
- 56 "The chief of these features is the *chajjas*, the overhanging cornice consisting of stone slabs projecting up to eight feet from the face of the wall, supported on a stone cove or bracket keyed and dovetailed back into the wall. In the pre-Moghul buildings they are found cut in hard quartzite with ridges and grooves – evidently in imitation of burnt tiles, at great cost of labour as they must have been unseen and useless." Herbert Baker, "Part 2: New Delhi," 21 November 1927, RIBA Study Room at the V&A, Sir Herbert Baker Archive, BaH/57/5, 5.
- 57 "In tropics," T. S. Lawrence wrote to Baker in 1925, "air (fresh or foul) is an enemy. Also sunlight. You want houses of immense height, and vigorous overhang." Herbert Baker, "Memorandum," 18 December 1913, BaH/2/1/5(vi), p. 6 of the document handed over to Captain Roberts at a meeting at the Raisina Hills site on the same day; letter, T.S. Lawrence to Baker, 3 November 1925, BaH/1/9/6.
- 58 Letter, Herbert Baker to Walgate, 25 January, RIBA Study Room at the V&A, Sir Herbert Baker Papers, BaH/57/6. Here Baker mentions his associate at the Secretariat works, Walter Sykes George.
- 59 Ibid.; also, letter, Herbert Baker to Lord Irwin, 20 May 1926, BaH/57/6.

- 60 Letter, Herbert Baker to Florence Baker, 16 March 1913, RIBA Study Room at the V&A, Sir Herbert Baker Papers, B2H/2/3, 1.
- 61 Ibid., 1–2.
- 62 Letter, Lord Hardinge of Penshurst to Edwin Lutyens, 4 August 1913, BaH/2/1/3.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 Letter, Baker to Baker, B2H/2/3, 2.
- 65 Herbert Baker, “Bakeriana,” 6 March 1935, RIBA Study Room at the V&A, Test Papers, BaH/6/5.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Herbert Baker, “Copy.”
- 68 Herbert Baker, “Symbolism in Art,” paper read at the weekly evening meeting of the Royal Institution of Great Britain, 17 November 1933, RIBA Study Room at the V&A, Sir Herbert Baker Archive, BaH/64/1, 5–6.
- 69 Baker, *Architecture and Personalities*, 71.
- 70 Letter, Herbert Baker to Marshall, 27 February 1925, BaH/57/4.
- 71 H.V. Lanchester, “The Architecture of the Empire,” *The Architectural Review* 55 (1924): 230.
- 72 Ibid., 231.
- 73 Herbert Baker, Address to Cambridge University Architectural Society, 17 November 1930, BaH/64/1, 16; Baker, “Edwin Lutyens: Thoughts prompted.”
- 74 Letter, Herbert Baker to D.Y. Cameron, June 1943, BaH/5/32, 1.
- 75 Ibid.
- 76 Herbert Baker, “Edwin Lutyens: Thoughts prompted.”
- 77 For more information on the Indo-British School of Architecture, see Gavin Stamp, “India: End of the Classical Tradition,” *Lotus International* 34 (1982): 80–81; Thomas Rigby, “India, Imperialism and Identity: Arthur Shoosmith” (March dissertation, University of Liverpool, 2017): 13–14; and Sagar Chauhan, “The Colonial Architecture of New Delhi: A study into the works of Walter Sykes George” (March dissertation, University of Liverpool, 2018): 42, 62.
- 78 Anon., “Obituary: Sir Herbert Baker,” *The Times*, 6 February 1946.
- 79 Arthur Shoosmith, “Present Day Architecture in India,” *19th Century and After* 123 (1938): 208.
- 80 Stamp defined *elemental* as “Modernism based upon mass rather than plane.” See Andrew Hopkins and Gavin Stamp (eds.), *Lutyens Abroad: The work of Sir Edwin Lutyens outside the British Isles* (London: The British School at Rome, 2002), 202.
- 81 Baker’s claims were questioned in a 1928 *Times of India* article, which criticised the Secretariats by saying “Not many who have worked in those rooms would accept this later theory.” Anon., “New Delhi Today – From Theory to Practice,” *Times of India*, 3 May 1928.
- 82 Richard Butler, “The Anglo-Indian architect Walter Sykes George (1881–1962): A Modernist follower of Lutyens,” *Architectural History* 55 (2012): 240.
- 83 Rigby, “India, Imperialism and Identity,” 36.
- 84 Letter, Baker to H. Keeling, January 1923.
- 85 Sally Mitchell (ed.), *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia* (Oxford: Routledge, 1988), 467; and Edwin Lutyens, “What I Think of Modern Architecture,” *Country Life Magazine* 69 (1931): 775–7.
- 86 Herbert Baker, “Architecture of the Empire,” paper for Round Table, RIBA Study Room at the V&A, Sir Herbert Baker Archive, BaH/64/3, 13.
- 87 Herbert Baker, paper read at Oxford on 10 February 1932, 12 February 1932, RIBA Study Room at the V&A, Sir Herbert Baker Archive, BaH/64/3, 8.
- 88 Walter Sykes George, “Indian Architecture: The Prospect Before Us,” *Journal of the Indian Institute of Architects* 17 (1951): 3; and Shoosmith, “Present Day Architecture in India,” 204.
- 89 Baker, address to Cambridge University, BaH/64/1, 9.
- 90 Herbert Baker, “New Delhi: Eastern and Western Architecture: A Problem of Style,” *The Times*, 3 October 1912; and Baker, “Architecture of the Empire.”
- 91 Baker believed in every step forward in science, the remarriage of the architect and the engineer and the old motto of “arts et scientia.” Baker, “Architecture of the Empire,” 3; Anon., “Indian Assembly: Parties and Leaders,” *The Times*, 20 January 1927; and Hope Bagenal, “The Acoustics of the New Legislative Chamber at Delhi,” *The Architect & Building News* (28 June 1929): 851–52.
- 92 Herbert Baker, “Architecture in relation to the Empire,” date unknown, RIBA Study Room at the V&A, Sir Herbert Baker Archive, BaH/64/1, 10.
- 93 These paintings provided for better promulgation of native Indian arts as opposed to the reproduction of Western arts. Herbert Furst, “Mr. Fyzee Rahamin’s Decorations at Delhi,” *Apollo: A Journal of the Arts* (July 1929): 16.

- 94 The Secretariats have often been mentioned as the finest headquarters of state administration in any country. Anon., "India's new capital: The inauguration of New Delhi," *Statesman*, 9 February 1931; Anon., "Indian artists' work for New Delhi," *The Pioneer*, 24 May 1928; Anon., "Decorating New Delhi," *The Pioneer*, 23 May 1928; and Anon., "Modern Indian art reviving old traditions," *The Illustrated London News*, 7 September 1929.
- 95 Sir Percival Phillips, "India's New Capital," *Daily Mail*, 10 February 1931; Anon., "New Delhi," *Times (London)*, 11 February 1931.
- 96 Dr James H. Cousins, "New Delhi: A Nightmare on the chest of India: Absence of taste," *Pioneer*, 9 July 1927; Lord Hardinge of Penhurst, "The cost of New Delhi: A comparison of values," *The Times*, 23 January 1931; Anon., "New Delhi Today," and C. H. Reilly, "The Indian Scene: Delhis, New and Old," *Manchester Guardian*, 3 March 1928.
- 97 Robert Grant Irving, *Indian Summer: Lutyens, Baker and Imperial Delhi* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 351.
- 98 Giles H. R. Tillotson, *The Tradition of Indian Architecture: Continuity, Controversy and Change since 1850* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 150.
- 99 Bhowmick, *Princely Palaces*, 204–7, and Butler, "The Anglo-Indian architect," 246.
- 100 Bahawalpur House additionally employed a Hindu bracketed arch, undoubtedly inspired by the entrance portico of the Council Chamber.
- 101 Ashok Jaitly, *St. Stephen's College: A History* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2006), 36.

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