

*Grünendahl – ARCHIVES DES ARTIFICES*  
*or*  
*The Reinvention of 'German Indology'*  
*in Terms of a Mythical Quest for National Origins*

Studia Indologica Universitatis Halensis

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## Preface

The following pages are a response to Pascale Rabault-Feuerhahn's book *L'archive des origines*<sup>1</sup>, which, as signalled in its subtitle, attempts to demonstrate a connection between Sanskrit philology and anthropology in 19th-century Germany.

In my view, this attempt fails for several reasons — not least because of the liberty Dr. Rabault-Feuerhahn takes with vital terms: her 'Allemagne' is a construct of German, Austrian and Swiss components, scraped together from Berlin, Bonn, Basel, Baltics, Bohemia, Bukovina, and plenty of places beyond and in between; she tacitly narrows down 'Sanskrit' to 'Vedic'; she commingles reductive and misleading notions of 'philology' and comparative linguistics (depicted as a product of 'Indo-Germanic' obsessions); and she shapes 'anthropology' into a stepping-stone towards the *telos* of her entire discourse, the hypothesis of a quasi-ideological bond between 'German Indology' and racism, anti-Semitism and, ultimately, National Socialism.

If proof could be found for her claims, a different response would have been called for. But neither in Dr. Rabault-Feuerhahn's book nor in the numerous array of books, articles and other contributions to the topic have I found valid evidence of the connection Dr. Rabault-Feuerhahn claims for her thesis.

The nucleus of my response is a review of Dr. Rabault-Feuerhahn's *Archive*, which I wrote in January 2010 at the invitation of the *Indo-Iranian Journal*. I indicated to the review editor of the *IJ* at the outset that my disagreement with Dr. Rabault-Feuerhahn's hypothesis was fundamental and that therefore a fundamental discussion was required, all the more so because the underlying notion of 'German Indology' as a hotbed of German nationalism and racism has been circulated in various other publications in recent years — even then, without adequate proof.

The editor accepted my request for additional space. So I proceeded, and submitted my review to the *IJ* in February 2010 (basically Part I of the present book).

The review was rejected for reasons to be specified at the beginning of Part II, in which I re-examine Dr. Rabault-Feuerhahn's discourse from a complementary perspective opened up by a more recent publication. In Part II, but also in Part I, I frequently draw on related cases to illustrate the underlying ideological strategies of argumentation

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1 P. RABAULT-FEUEHRAHN, *L'archive des origines: Sanskrit, philologie, anthropologie dans l'Allemagne du XIXe siècle*. Préface de Charles Malamoud. Paris: Les Éditions du CERF 2008 [Bibliothèque franco-allemande].

which I think are symptomatic of an unfortunate debate of a — to say the least — dubious nature.

Although my response exceeds the size and scope of a regular review, Part I still follows Dr. Rabault-Feuerhahn's narrative. My general approach is to point out her argument and test it against the documentation provided by herself. I do, however, supply additional material which I hope will go some way to prove that Dr. Rabault-Feuerhahn's theses lack proper historical foundation.

It may be felt that my approach is excessive, excessively literal, or perhaps even obsessive. I have nothing to say to that, except that I have made it a practice to establish whether a given discourse stands up to the evidence cited in its own support. If the discourse strategy used is such that it neglects, glosses over, or even falsifies evidence, then one must assume that the results yielded are not very trustworthy. This I have found confirmed more than once in Dr. Rabault-Feuerhahn's book, as well as in related cases.

It may, of course, be argued that the (assumed) provocativeness of hypotheses such as those put forward by Dr. Rabault-Feuerhahn is a merit in itself, and that empiricist concepts of 'evidence' and 'facts' are an inadequate measure of their real achievement, which is to open new ground by challenging standard histories. To that I reply that without evidence there can neither be 'new ground' nor 'challenge'. Besides, why should Dr. Rabault-Feuerhahn have bothered about evidence in the first place, if not in the ambition to authenticate her supposedly provocative hypotheses according to 'empiricist' standards of debate? However, such authentication cannot be had without the risk of invalidation, which is inevitable if, e.g., the evidence turns out to be false, or if it is superseded by evidence to the contrary. Stripped of its authentication, the hypothesis can then be relegated to the realm of unfounded opinions and preconceptions, one would think. But nowhere has this conclusion turned out to be less true than in her wider field of operation. As will be shown in several examples, views and opinions that have long been disproved, in some cases more than a century ago, are still passed off as valid arguments. When Edward W. Said, in the "Afterword to the 1995 printing" of his *Orientalism* (1978), came to speak of misreadings and misrepresentations, it was not to admit and put right the numerous errors and distortions that had by then been pointed out to him by experts in a field that he knew preciously little about, but to style himself as the victim of "very hostile" and "uncomprehending" criticism, which, however, left him so unimpressed that he never gave it serious consideration. In this attitude, too, E.W. Said has set the tone for his countless direct and indirect intellectual heirs, a number of whom, as will be seen, have left their distinct mark on Dr. Rabault-Feuerhahn's book.

I am thoroughly convinced that a serious study of the works of 19th-century Indologists is enough to show to an unbiased reader the inadequacy of the theories woven around them in the last decades. Therefore, my main concern is not to disprove these

various theoretical edifices, but rather to observe at close range the erudite engineering that has been employed to set them up.

I thank friends and colleagues in various places for their inspiring comments, from which this final version has benefitted more than I can say.

R. G.

*Notice*

Emphases in quotes are original, unless otherwise indicated.

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