

Red Fort 4 : Plan of the Emperor's Garden, Delhi  
 Watercolor on paper, 1774, 252 x 100.5 cm, V&A, AL 1764  
 Inscription : "Sérail et Jardin du Palais du grand Mogol à Dely no 12 [crossed] 13"

# LOST PALACES OF DELHI

*The European Connection*

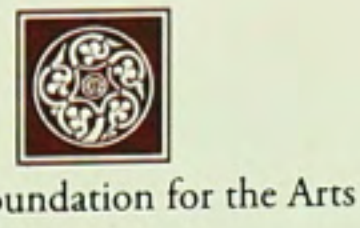
Art Heritage Gallery, New Delhi  
 7th-27th December, 2006

An EurIndia Project  
 Sponsored by the Economic Cross Cultural Programme  
 of the European Union

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 Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BnF)  
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Curated by  
**Jean-Marie Lafont**  
 &  
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EurIndia is funded by the EU-India Economic Cross Cultural Programme  
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## INTRODUCTION

### Lost Palaces of Delhi from the Gentil Collection

In the 18th century India was one of the richest regions in the world.

The collapse of the Mughal Empire following the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, led to the emergence of the so-called "successor states" in India. The internal dynamics of several principalities such as Avadh, Rohilkhand, Hyderabad and Mysore, occasioned the birth of new socio-political entities like the Marathas, Jats and the Sikhs. These newly formed states were now compelled to modernize their administrative and military infrastructures in order to survive the growing influence and territorial expansion of the East India Company, established in 1600.

Indian statesmen began to introduce military reforms in their respective states with the help of European specialists, most of whom were French, and some German, Swiss, Italian, Portuguese and English. The little explored, but significant aspects of political life in India during the late 18th century, resulted in a 'cultural encounter'. Consequently, the focus of this exhibition is a direct association with the means of cultural reciprocity shared between Europe and India, with particular emphasis on Avadh.

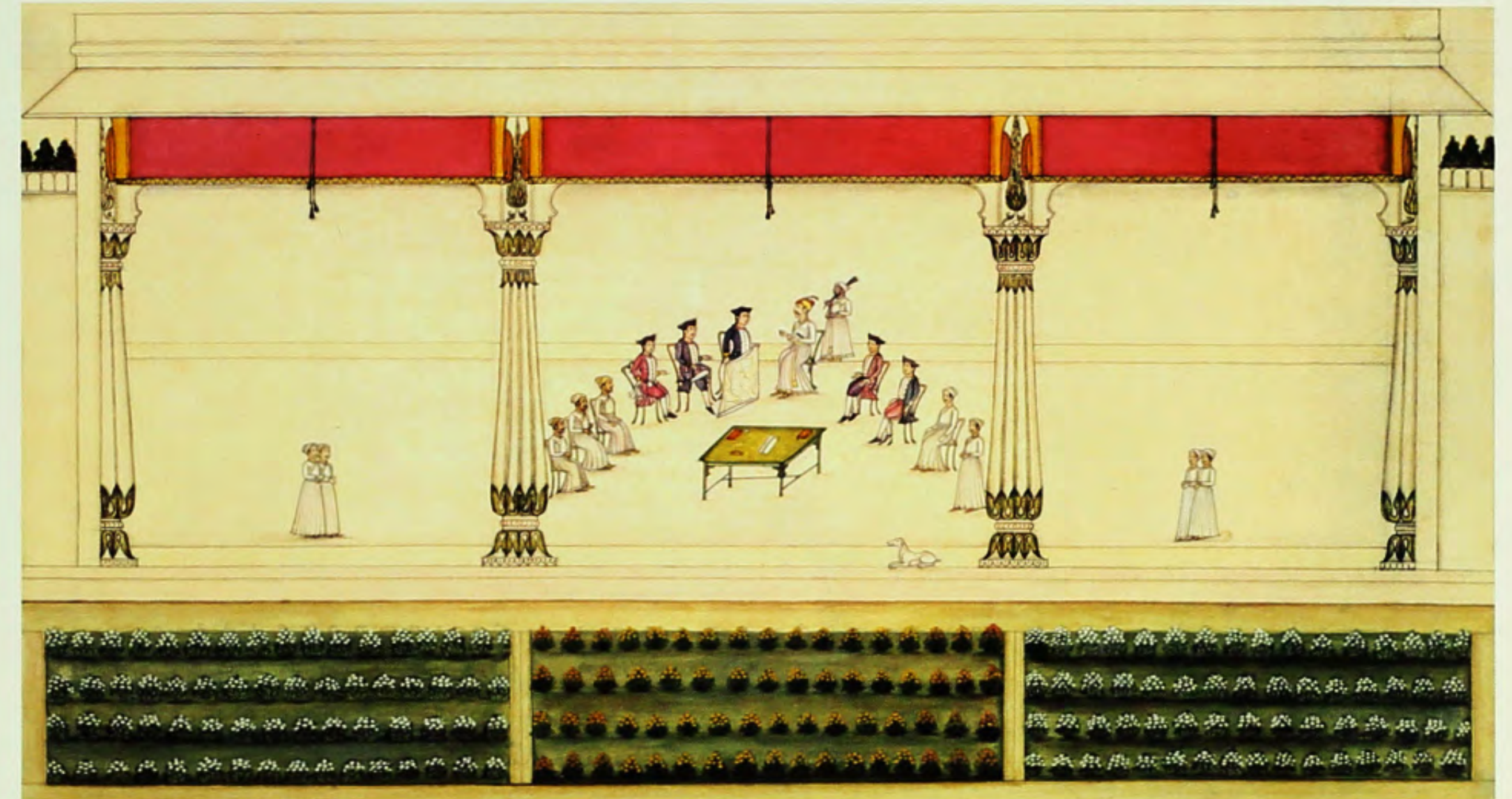


#### 1. Portrait of Colonel Gentil

Oil on canvas by Léon Allègre, from a drawing by Bourdier, engraved by Coqueret and published as the frontispiece of Gentil's 'Mémoires sur l'Indoustan ou Empire Mogol', Paris, 1822.

Size unknown. This is one of several paintings of Gentil in Bagnols-sur-Cèze, untraceable today.

Inscription: "Le Colonel Gentil, Général des troupes Mogoles (Asie) né à Bagnols 1726, † à B. 1799" [Colonel Gentil, General commanding the Mughal troops (Asia), born in Bagnols in 1726, died in B. in 1799]



#### 2. The Treaty of Benares, watercolour on paper, 1765, V&A, IS-25-1980 (20)

Gentil commissioned an album of paintings entitled "Recueil de toutes sortes de Dessins sur les Usages et coutumes des Peuples de l'Indoustan ou Empire Mogol d'après plusieurs peintres indiens, Névasilal, Mounsingue etc. ... en 1774 à Faizabad". This album (37 x 53.5 cm) contains 57 miniature paintings in watercolour, and is currently in the V & A Museum, London.

Inscription: "Traité du nabab avec les Anglais à Benares. Le colonel Gentil était présent"

[ "Treaty of the Nawab with the English at Benares. Colonel Gentil was present" ]

## GENTIL IN AVADH

(BnF, V&A and other private collections)

Jean-Baptiste Gentil (1726-1799) came to India as a French military officer in 1752. He served under the Marquis of Bussy in the Deccan and also worked for the Nizam of Hyderabad for a short period. After the French were defeated in India in 1761, Gentil served Kasim Ali Khan, Nawab of Bengal, and then, Shuja-ud-daula (r. 1754-1775), the Nawab of Avadh.

During his time in India, Gentil amassed a fine collection of Indian manuscripts and albums of miniature paintings. He subsequently fell in love in Faizabad with a young Indo-Portuguese lady from Delhi, named Thérèse Velho de Castro, whom he later married in 1772.

Gentil was a close adviser and friend of Shuja-ud-daula, for whom he conducted successful negotiations with the British in 1765, in order to save Avadh from outright annexation. However, he was forced to leave India in 1775 after the premature death of the Nawab. He reached France with his family in 1778 and presented a large part of his collection to King Louis XVI. In 1788, he was called to Versailles to receive the Ambassadors of Tipu Sultan. Stripped of his pension during the Revolution, he died in his native city of Bagnols-sur-Cèze in 1799.





3. Shuja-ud-daula and Colonel Gentil in Faizabad, watercolour on paper, 1750-1800, 51 x 73 cm, BnF. Od 32, Vol. 1



4. Portrait of Donna Juliana

From François Valentyn, *Zaaken van den GODSTIDIENST op het EYLAND JAVA Also ok een Beshhryving van het Nederlandsch Comptoir un SURATTE en van de levens des GROOTE MOGOLS...*, Dordrecht and Amsterdam, volume IV, part 2, 1726, illustration on p. 196-197. Courtesy Gent University.  
Gentil married Thérèse Velho de Castro in 1772, an Indo-Portuguese lady from Delhi. She was the great grand-niece of Juliana.

## MUGHAL PALACES & VIEWS OF DELHI, AGRA AND FAIZABAD

In 1983, Suzan Gole acknowledged the remarkable cartography work done by the French officers in the service of the Nizam of Hyderabad between c.1750 - 1760. Five years later, she published the fascinating 'Maps of Mughal India Drawn by Colonel Jean-Baptiste Gentil...at Faizabad, in 1770'.

French engineers in the 1770's, like Gentil, Canaple, Polier (Swiss/French), Vallory, Pallebot, Martin etc. (some of them in association with German Jesuit scholars like Wendel and Tieffenthaler), working for the Nizam and the Mughals, performed an impressive and unprecedented task by surveying the land and recording their geographic positions, based on latitude and longitude.

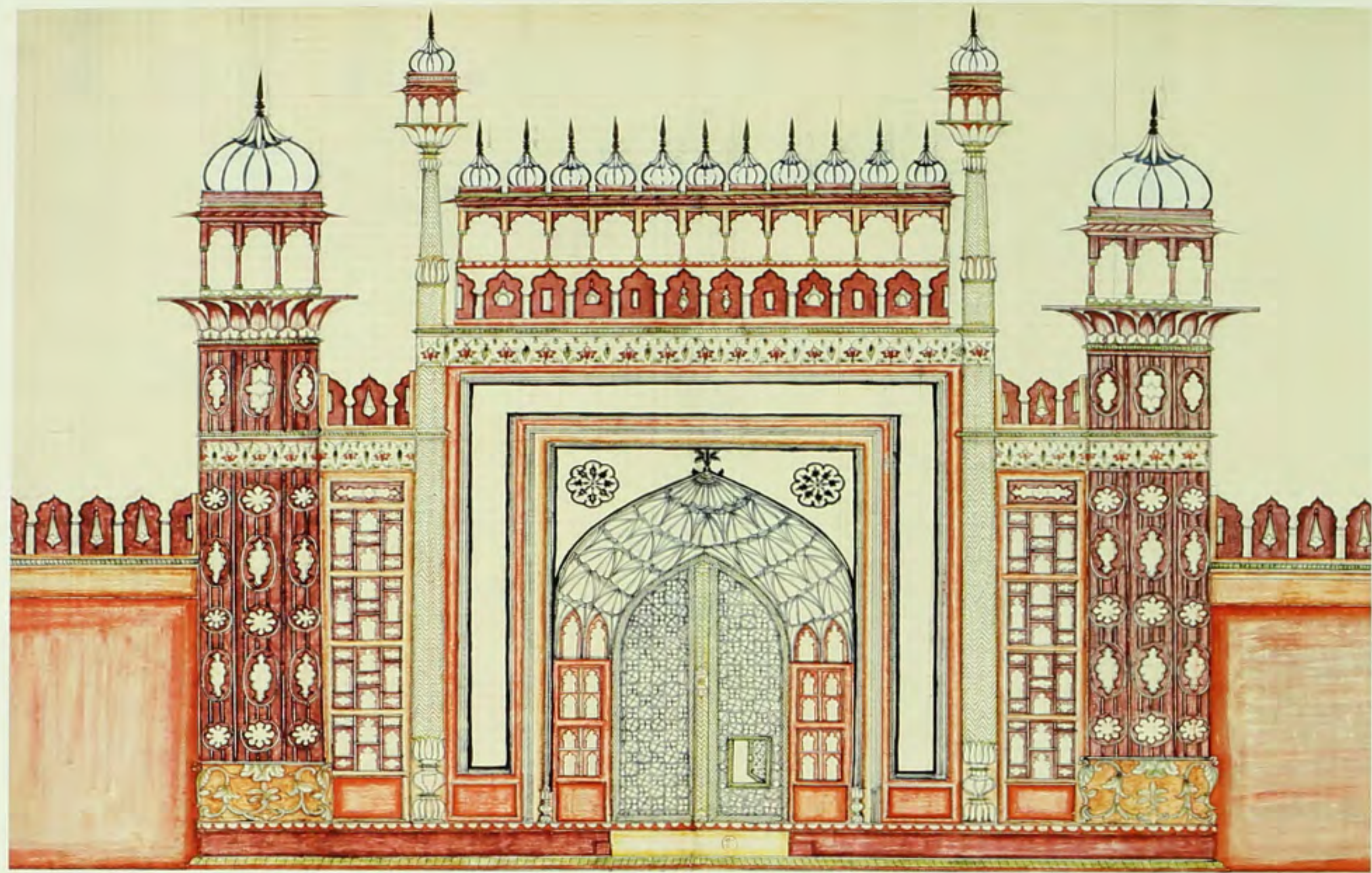
Like Polier, de Boigne and Martin, Colonel Gentil was not simply interested in surveying and mapping. He was also drawn to pre-Mughal, Mughal and contemporary architecture. In 1774, he commissioned a series of large paintings of palaces in Delhi, Agra and Faizabad by an Indian architect of Shuja-ud-daula. Most of these paintings are now in the Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris. Album Od 63), while some reproductions seem to have found their way into the Victoria & Albert Museum. They are presented here together for the first time, along with few other rare documents dealing with Mughal Delhi.

Gentil's collection is an exquisite but complex body of work, particularly those aspects dealing with the history of the monumental paintings. Anquetil Duperron mentions that out of the 133 manuscripts ("Indian, Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit") given by Gentil to the King's Library in 1785, 124 were new entries in the King's Collection. As for albums of miniature paintings, they formed a collection of 14 volumes and various rolls ("rouleaux"), later comprising "Palais des rois de l'Inde" [Palaces of the Kings of India]. We know that the same albums were occasionally removed from the King's Library. For instance, in 1787 they were lent to the engraver, Ponce, and in 1788, to Campion de Tersan, for closer inspection and study. Gentil himself took them for a period of time in 1791. Then it seems, the documents eventually found their way to the Royal Library (aka Imperial or National Library), where they have remained since.

The monumental paintings were first kept in rolls. They were later mounted in a large album (Od 63). A list of 25 monumental paintings, some of them in several sections or plans (i.e. the Jama Masjid, or Dara Shikoh's palace in Agra) are preserved in a manuscript, identified as BnF Ye62 in the Bibliothèque in Paris. However, there are a few discrepancies with the actual collection. Item no. 10 mentions "Two views of Delhi" which are not to be found anymore, nor can we find item no. 21 "Plan of the Palace of the Emperor in Acbad [sic: Akbarabad / Agra?]", or 22 [View of Multanpour (?)]. In some other cases, the description we find in Ye62 is not exactly the same as the captions we have on the existing documents reproduced here. The "Tomb of Safdar Jang" is not in the collection anymore, while "Serai or the House of Shuja-ud-daula in Delhi", might infact be "Serai or the House of Safdar Jang in Delhi", reproduced here as image 18.

The findings here are provisional. We whole-heartedly encourage further research into the cultural heritage of both nations, and extend our support to the generations of scholars who will pursue this avenue of work in the future.



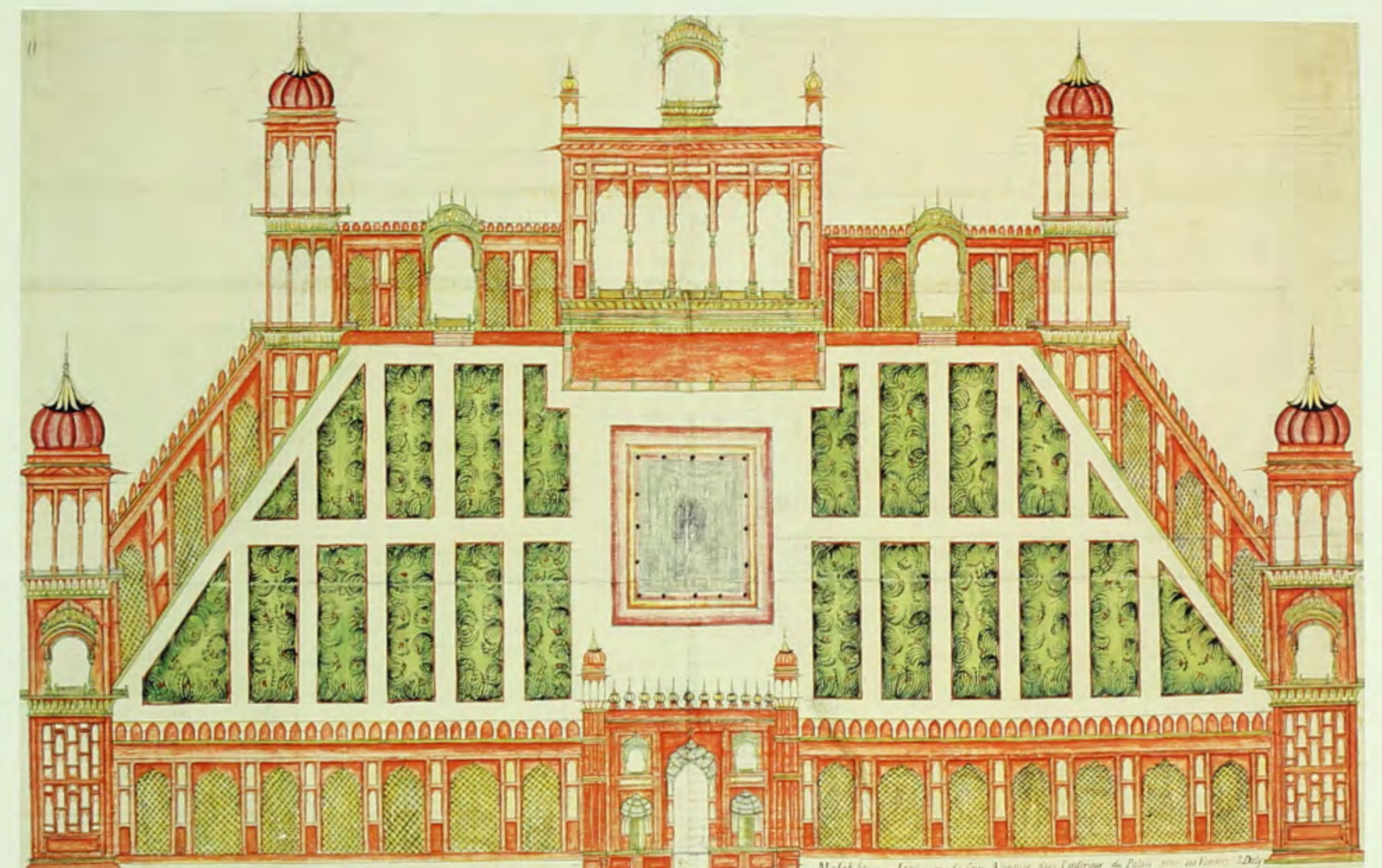


8. Red Fort 2 : Gate of the Fort leading to the Palace of the Emperor

Watercolour on paper, 89 x 59 cm, BnF. Od 63-14

Inscription 1: "Porte du Fort où est le Palais de l'Empereur"

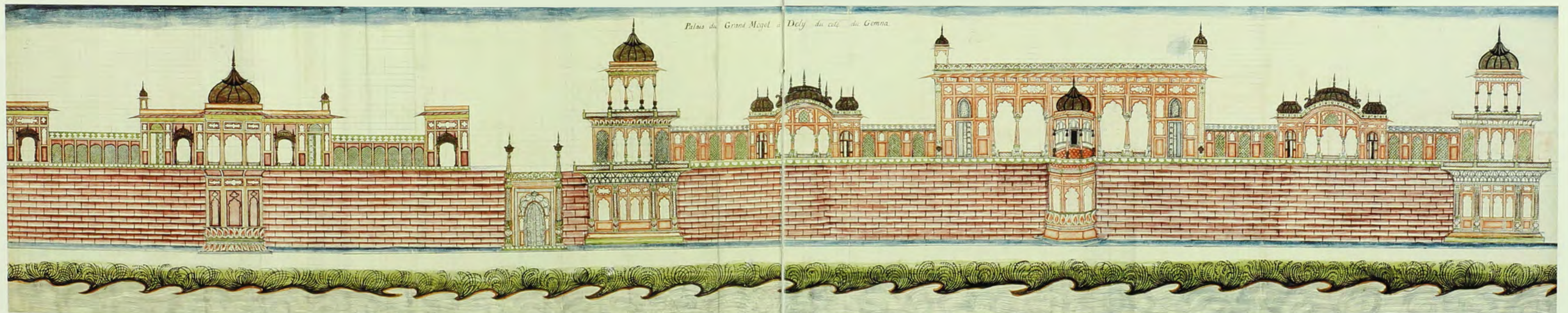
Inscription 2: "Pierre rouge incrustée en marbre blanc et noir. Le dessus des dômes en marbre blanc" [Red stone with encrustations in white and black marble. The domes are also covered with white marble]



10. Red Fort 5 : Mahtab Bagh. Garden built by Aurangzeb for his wives

Watercolour on paper, 122 x 68 cm, BnF. Od 63-11

Inscription : "Malab (sic) Bague. Jardin que fit faire Alemgir dans l'intérieur du palais pour ses femmes à Dély" [Mahtab Bagh. Garden made by Aurangzeb for his wives inside the Palace in Delhi]



9. Red Fort 1: Palace of the Great Mughal in Delhi on the Banks of the Jamuna

Watercolour on paper, 224 x 46.5 cm, BnF. Od 63-03

Inscription : "Palais du Grand Mogol à Dély du côté du Gemna" [ref. Title]





36. Portrait of an artist working on a miniature, gouache on paper, BnF. Od 41-45 verso

## CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH & SPONSORSHIP OF ARTISTS IN AVADH

Gentil was interested in the history, religions, regional cultures and traditions of India. His curiosity focused on Hinduism and Islam, as well as Sikhism. His close friend, Anquetil Duperron, became the first European to receive a full copy of the Zend Avesta (1771) and subsequently translated it into European languages.

With the help of Indian scholars, Gentil translated his manuscripts into French as collected volumes, with the help of archaeological and iconographical evidence (his exploration of the Ellora caves), as well as numismatic material. This was an outstanding effort on part of an European officer living in an independent state of India, at a time when no other European knew Sanskrit, nor had the Asiatic Society of Bengal been established (founded only in Calcutta, 1784). The following are illustrations taken from three of Gentil's unpublished manuscripts (kept in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris).

The collection comprises richly illustrated sheets with drawings made in the early 1770's by Indian artists in Avadh, namely Man Singh and Devasi Lal. Gentil adds a tantalizing "etc." to their names. This possibly indicates that he used a group of miniature artists from the ateliers of royal courtiers at the time.



37. Portrait of Emperor Shah Alam II  
Emperor Shah Alam II reviewing a company of French soldiers presented by Colonel Gentil, Great seal of the reigning Emperor, Small seal of Shah Alam II, Gouache on paper, 1772, Faizabad, BnF. Fr 24219, page D recto



38. The Peacock Throne  
Gouache on paper, 1772, Faizabad, BnF. Fr 24219, page 249  
Inscription: "Trone du paon"  
[The Peacock Throne]



39. Portrait of historian Muhammed Kasim  
Gouache on paper, 1772, Faizabad, BnF. Fr 24219, page D verso  
Inscription: "Mahmed Cassim auteur d'une histoire générale de l'Indoustan dont on a tiré presque tout cet abrégé"  
[Muhammed Kasim, author of a General History of Hindustan from where I took most of the information of my Abrégé]



40. Portrait of Nizam ul-Mulk  
Gouache on paper, 1772, Faizabad BnF. Fr. 24219, page 412