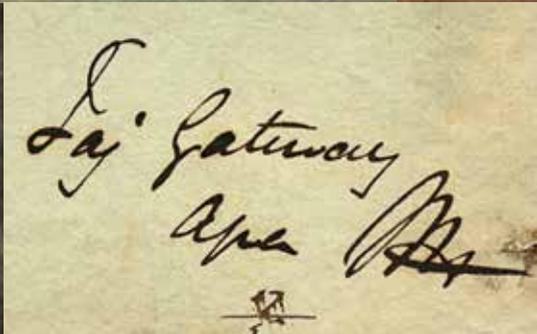
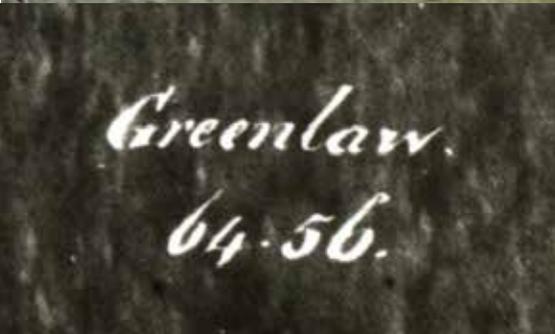
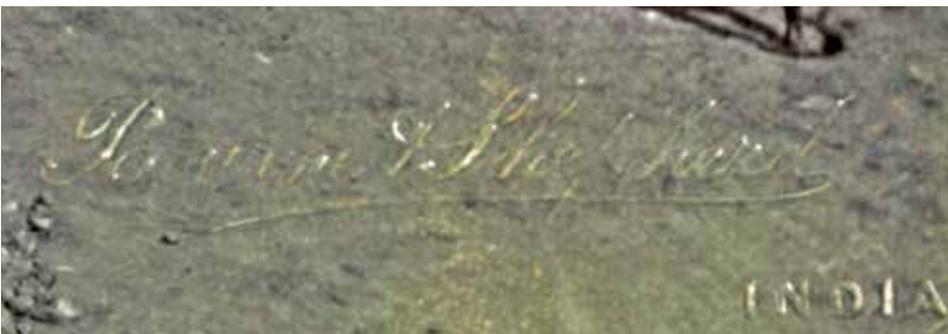


Unveiling India





Unveiling India

THE EARLY LENS MEN 1850—1910

Rahaab Allana • Davy Depelchin



MAPIN PUBLISHING

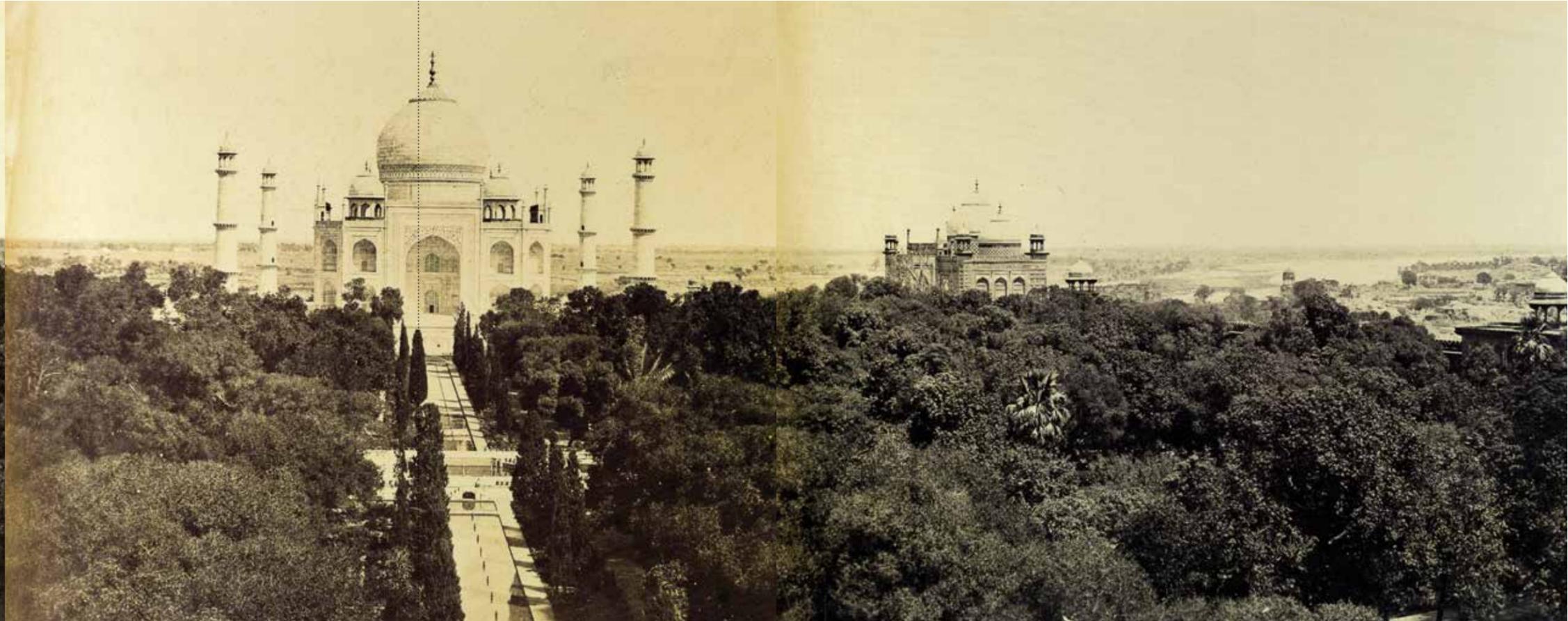
The Alkazi Collection of Photography



Indian Council for Cultural Relations

international arts festival
europalia.india

Royal Museums
of Fine Arts of Belgium



First published in India in 2014 by
Mapin Publishing Pvt. Ltd and
The Alkazi Collection of Photography
The publication is in conjunction with the
europalia.india festival
in collaboration with
the **Indian Council of Cultural Relations**.

An exhibition of the same name will be on view
at the **Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium**
in collaboration with
the **Alkazi Foundation for the Arts**, New Delhi,
from December 6, 2013 to March 9, 2014
as part of the **europalia.india festival**.

The publishers wish to thank
Indian Council of Cultural Relations, New Delhi,
and the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium,
for their support.

Simultaneously published in the
United States of America in 2014 by
Grantha Corporation
E: mapin@mapinpub.com

The Alkazi Collection of Photography, New Delhi
rahaab@acparchives.com

Distributed in North America by
Antique Collectors' Club
T: 1 800 252 5231 • F: 413 529 0862
E: sales@antiquecc.com
www.accdistribution.com/us

Distributed in United Kingdom and Europe by
Gazelle Book Services Ltd.
T: 44 1524-68765 • F: 44 1524-63232
E: sales@gazellebooks.co.uk
www.gazellebookservices.co.uk

Distributed in Southeast Asia by
Paragon Asia Co. Ltd T: 66 2877 7755 • F: 66 2468 9636
E: info@paragonasia.com

Distributed in the rest of the world by
Mapin Publishing Pvt. Ltd
706 Kaivanna, Panchvati, Ellisbridge
Ahmedabad 380006 INDIA
T: 91 79 4022 8228 • F: 91 79 4022 8201
E: mapin@mapinpub.com www.mapinpub.com

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ISBN: 978-81-89995-84-3 (Mapin)
ISBN: 978-1-935677-40-6 (Grantha)
LCCN: 2013xxxxxx (to come)

Copyediting: Carmen Kagal / Mapin Editorial
Editorial Assistance: Neha Manke / Mapin Editorial
Design: Jalp Lakhia / Mapin Design Studio
Production: Gopal Limbad / Mapin Design Studio
Printed by Parksons Graphics, Mumbai

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ACP: 2000.05.0028, 29 & 30

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MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
RAJYA SABHA
(UPPER HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT)

Dr. Karan Singh



PRESIDENT
INDIAN COUNCIL FOR
CULTURAL RELATIONS
(ICCR)

Message

Photography was introduced in India in 1840, soon after being patented in Europe in 1839. The pioneers of photography in India were employees of the English East India Company, whose chief functionaries understood that this could be an efficient tool for documenting geographical and topographical information, previously rendered through drawings and watercolours. These pioneers also used photography as a medium to create an ethnographical record which documented the ever changing panorama of life in India and would serve as a basis for furthering the 19th century penchant for "scientific" inquiry, as well as a historical record which has proved invaluable to those engaged in reconstructing the past.

This exhibition focuses on the relationship between early photographs of Indian architecture and how India was perceived by those behind the camera. It includes rare Wax Paper Negatives by Dr. John Murray and Alexander Greenlaw which not only provide an insight into the early processes of picture making, but take the viewer on a journey through time with the development of landscape photography. The exhibition also provides a glimpse into the beginnings of professional photography in India, showcasing the works of Nicholas & Co., Samuel Bourne and Raja Deen Dayal & Sons as examples of early commercial studios in the three presidencies of colonial India—Calcutta, Bombay and Madras.

I feel that this exhibition will provide the viewer with unique insights into an India poised on the cusp of change between the ancient and the modern, as perceived by foreign visitors who not only recorded their surroundings but were themselves also agents of change. On behalf of the ICCR, I take this opportunity to thank all those involved in conceiving and implementing this project.

(Dr. Karan Singh)
General Commissioner,
europalia.india 2013-14

MESSAGE

Baron Philippe Vlerick

General Commissioner, europalia.india

Cultural Encounters with India

The theme of Encounters' is the common thread running through the europalia.india Festival. Explored in exhibitions, concerts, dance and theatre performances, literary events and conferences, it offers an opportunity and a pretext to entice the European public to discover India.

India has shaped itself over time and continues to transform, enriched by many encounters with other cultures, while at the same time, shaping and transforming those impregnated by its culture. Confrontation, exchange, assimilation, discovery, resistance, the source of progress or misfortune, but also love... the encounter is a beautiful metaphor for India and allows us to approach this country in all its complexity and cultural richness.

To realize this ambitious project, Europalia International has partnered with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. Numerous European and Indian experts have assisted and collaborated to develop—in consultation with Belgian and European festival partners—an artistic programme of the highest quality.

The exhibition “Unveiling India: The Early Lensmen (1850–1910)” will shine a light on pioneering photography in India through a selection of photos and negatives never before exhibited in Europe. Presented at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts, this exhibition offers a unique glimpse of the magnificent collection of 19th and early 20th century photographs from the Alkazi Foundation for the Arts, itself dedicated to the exploration and study of Indian cultural history.

This exhibition, like all the events on the europalia.india programme, would not have been possible without the vital and generous support of our partners, to whom I wish to express our deep gratitude.



Unknown Photographer & Publisher

'Moombadevi Road, Bombay'

Tinted Phototype Postcard, 1907,

86 x 137 mm

ACP: 2001.15.0255

Photography and Legacy

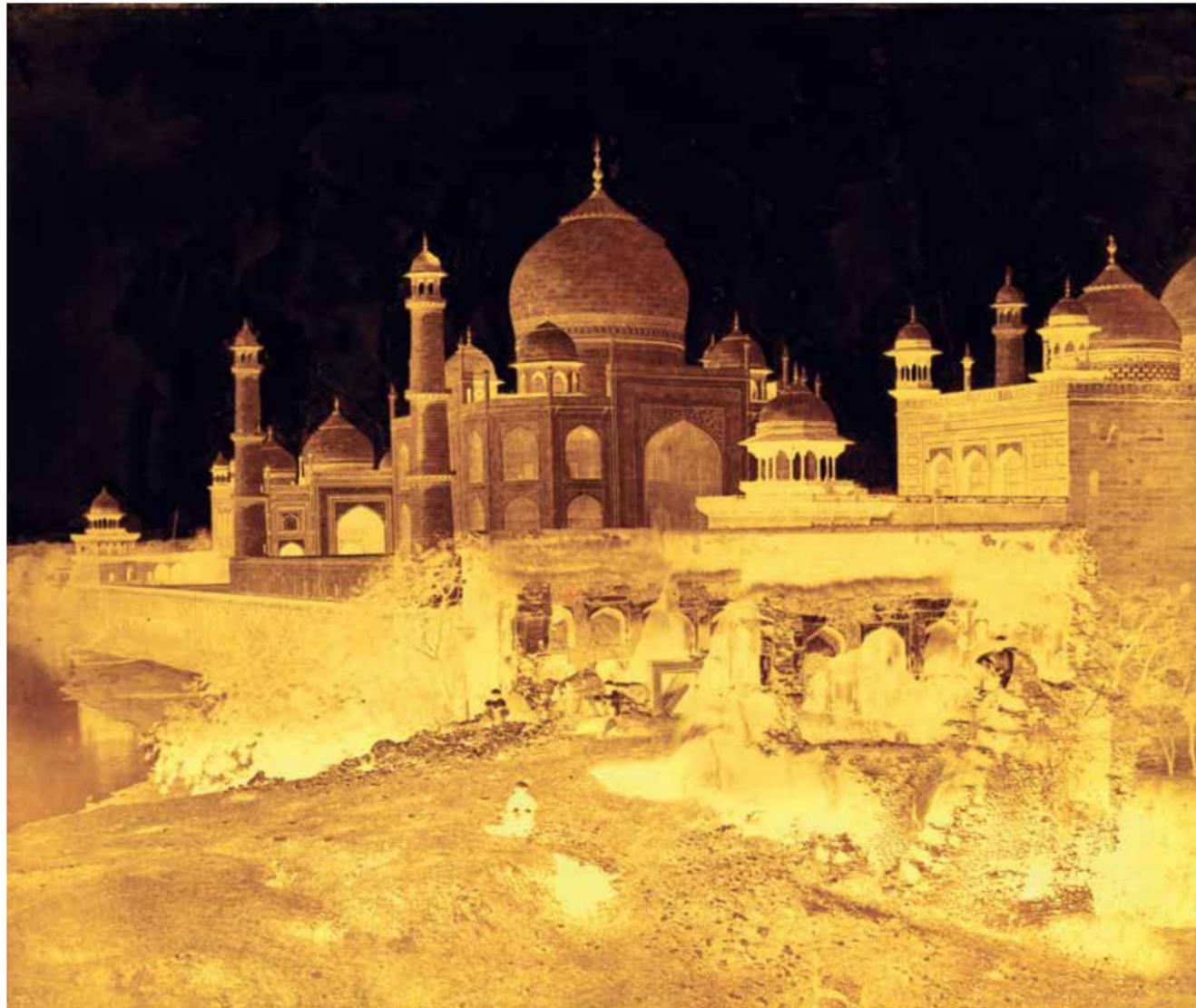
Deep in the plains of Northern India, a British photographer rises to the call for prayer at sunrise. Soon, he strains to carry his equipment: a tent, various chemicals and a bulky Gandolfi camera through a misty morning with his retinue of armed labourers. They settle on the banks of a river, the Yamuna, recently fed by the autumn showers and take a moment's respite. Looking from the shore to the west, clearing from the haze of light, what captures their imagination—is a citadel. It is at once a place of worship, and a tomb, fused into a single structure; in equal measure—mesmeric—it gradually appears in the reflection of water from the river.

The photographer John Murray is captivated by the majesty of the Taj Mahal and looks upon it as a sight to behold. His engagement over several hours and days that lead into weeks, months and eventually years speaks of his commitment and passion for achieving a sense of perfection in capturing the monument in its glory—a demand made upon himself so as to present to the world an edifice as he sees it through his own eyes, and with the same measure of affection as his own sight.

The building of an art collection, and in this case a photography archive, has similar intent. It is the ability to return to people what they have rightly shared with the world. The archive is about *giving, adapting and persevering* through time and throughout a period of change and evolution. While in the 19th century this may be imagined through the vast repositories of material objects, the photograph too was a communicator of perspectives, a challenger of norms that led to a shifting understanding of trend, and of aesthetic taste. It allowed people to take their bearings from life but also recast life on the terms they saw the world, and indeed what they desired from the world.

In trying to piece the world together, this archive, which is meant for the public, will grow only *through and with* the public. It is through our collective memories that a repository such as this will be able to reach out and connect with the past as much as it may envision the future, and the emerging domains of new media. The future of any visual archive therefore lies in its ability to speak without words, to communicate across social strata and to sustain the belief that our past as well as our present is in a constant state of transformation that must be documented, researched and studied with the keenness, clarity and depth as that of an actual *image* of the world. In such a manner, does that archive become part of a living legacy and a force that must allow us to take our bearings from what we *can* see?

Murray was one such unique force in the history of photography in India, as through these first extant images of the Taj, we now know that timelessness and agelessness constitute the true nature of art in India, and one that draws its breath of fresh air from life itself.



John Murray
Taj Mahal with Ruins in the foreground, Agra
 Waxed-Paper Negative, 1858–1862,
 378 x 457 mm
 ACP: 99.17.0122

INTRODUCTION

Michel Draguet

Director General of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium

India Unveiled

India is looked at from Europe with increasing fascination. The interest shown by Westerners for this part of the world is deeply rooted in history. Already in the 5th and early 4th century BC, India was described by Herodotus and Ctesias. Not impeded by their total lack of knowledge of the country in the East, both Greeks populated it with the most improbably fantastic flora and fauna. India became a continent that spoke to the imagination, filled with creatures that sprang from Western imagination. Although the image created then of an enchanted India would survive for centuries in European popular culture, the general increase in knowledge would ensure that an image was created that answered to reality. The expeditions of Alexander the Great certainly had a share in this process. Nevertheless, it would be necessary to wait until the 15th and 16th centuries before there was direct contact between Europe and India. Enchanted India would systematically make way for eyewitness reports, but this did not mean India's attraction would decrease. Its rich history, its cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity, and its capacity for unleashing countless sensory impressions still appeal to the contemporary mind. Only this no longer rests on what Europeans think of India—fortunately!—but on what India essentially is.

It is my conviction that the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (RMFAB) may not remain on the sidelines when an institutional ally organizes a multidisciplinary cultural festival with a guest country such as India. Cooperation with Europalia International is always a pleasure, and with that I would like to offer my heartfelt thanks to Baron Philippe Vlerick, General Commissioner of europalia.india, as well as Europalia General Manager Kristine De Mulder and her team for this new partnership. However, the project *Unveiling India* would never have come about without additional organizational support from the Indian side. Our particular thanks goes out to the President of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, Dr. Karan Singh and the ICCR team, as well as the Embassy of India in Brussels and the Ambassador, His Excellency Mr. Dinkar Khullar.

If it has been possible to show a careful selection of photographic negatives and positives with Indian subjects in Brussels, then this is in the first place thanks to Ebrahim Alkazi, founder and chairman of the Alkazi Foundation for the Arts (AFA), New Delhi. The RMFAB are also particularly grateful that a broad selection of works from the Alkazi Collection of Photography (ACP) has been given in loan in the context of the europalia.india festival and that Curator Rahaab Allana was prepared to lead the project for the AFA. The extraordinary quality of the ACP and the team of young, dynamic researchers who work there make the AFA a centre of expertise for Indian photography to be reckoned with.

In addition, I would also like to thank the Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs, under the direction of His Excellency Minister Didier Reynders, for their organizational and logistic support of this project; in particular, I am also grateful to the Belgian Embassy in New Delhi and its ambassador, His Excellency Mr. Pierre Vaesen.

Finally, I would like to thank Mr. Bipin Shah, Publisher and Managing Director at Mapin Publishing, for the highly effective approach that has produced this catalogue.



Unknown Photographer
Parsi Gymnasts
Albumen Print, 1860–1890,
142 x 99 mm
ACP: 94.91.0001



Early Landscape Photography in India

Rahaab Allana

A haunting sequence in a documentary film by Nishtha Jain titled *Calcutta: City of Photos* (2005) depicts a photograph of the famine-stricken subjects of Madras in 1876–78 by W. W. Hooper (1837–1912), digitally morphed in front of a modern-day painted backdrop of the Taj.¹ For me, this metaphor presents a potent message about the history of ‘seeing’ a colony through the eyes of an ‘outsider’, a satire in the most macabre sense of the word wherein the ground reality of India and the Victorian imagination create a surface friction that sheds light on the complexity of deconstructing of the era even today (Fig. 1).

The history of photography in India is tied to colonialism and conquest from its earliest days, arriving at the port city of Calcutta (present-day Kolkata) in 1840, known to be one of the richest Presidency states at the time and later the Capital of British India.² Early documentary photography was a tool used to visualize space that was inhabited or controlled by the English East India Company, and is now often viewed as a two-dimensional embodiment of distant lands and faraway territories in an absorbable format—one that communicated both fascination and power³ (Fig. 2). Accordingly, by physically turning the camera from a vertical to a horizontal position, the photographer broadened his or her field of vision from a portrait to a landscape view, capturing more and more of what lay in front of the lens. This also indicates, that some of the earliest factors that conditioned how and what the West saw of the East, were based on painterly manners drawn directly from the West, and adopted by practitioners in India.



Fig. 1 W.W. Hooper
Madras Famine Coolies
Albumen Print, 1876–1878,
165 x 216 mm
ACP: 94.107.0060

Previous pages
Fig. 25 Unknown Photographer
**Rampart Row (From Watson’s
Hotel)—Bombay**
Albumen Print, 1860–1890,
188 x 235 mm
ACP: 94.92.0023



Fig. 2 Samuel Bourne
**Great Eastern Hotel and Old Court
House Street, Calcutta**
Albumen Print, Photographer’s
Ref. 1740, 1867, 188 x 320 mm
ACP: 94.120.0027

The first portion of this article ponders how landscape painting had lasting consequences on the photographer’s eye, and how the camera subsequently mediates, enhances, or distorts the subject’s as well as the viewer’s perception. Looking at the work of John Murray (1809–1898) and Alexander Greenlaw (1818–1870), two of the earliest photographers in India who produced landscape and architectural work in the north and south, illustrates how the visualization of ruins and the approaches to landscape were conditioned by the Picturesque School of Painting. At the same time, there is a keen notice given to the political climate, namely pre and post-Mutiny, as the yearning for an idealized view of the colony that inevitably gets disturbed allows for the entry point for more recent study on the ideological practices of the *aesthetics of conflict*.⁴ To illustrate this point further, the article looks at the work of Samuel Bourne (1843–1912) and Raja Deen Dayal (1844–1905), as two of the most significant survey and landscape practitioners in India whose oeuvre receives critical acclaim at the time.

From antiquated land and the mystifying qualities of the pastoral, we move to the swiftly changing cityscape. The second section of the article, then considers images of cityscapes, and the photographic representations of Madras, Calcutta and Bombay between the 1860s and the 1920s which were facilitated through favourable circumstances—the emergence of photographic societies, the colonial mission of inventorying India’s monuments and its people, advancements in photographic technology and the booming of amateur photographic practices. These developments led to the creation of rich legacies that trace a layered and nuanced evolution of the ‘modern Indian metropolis’ through visuals. Through

these images, the dedicated section locates ways in which the modern ideals of infrastructure and administration were visualized.

Through the article, some stress is given to the indexical relationship between images and events. The kind of loss, isolation or even overt romanticism communicated through some of the images, enhances their referential capacity, their ability to present the illusion of quietude yet their allegorical references are mostly to the lack of it. The distinction between the 'real' and the 'represented' may also help us think about the circulation of these distinct images. Were they used mainly for survey, did they have a commercial value or were they used as private memorabilia alone?

The Wide Angle

Preoccupying British aesthetes, tourists, garden designers, philosophers, writers and artists from the 1790s until the 1820s, the picturesque shaped a powerful dialectic between artifice and nature, between land and landscape.⁵

The 19th century historiography of art in India has always presented the complex of looking beyond the image to understand the intentionality of the photographer—or looking through the image at its real aim or objective. Some of these discourses have been aided by the field of Orientalism in the visual arts—the consideration, as Prof. Giles Tillotson notes, that ‘cultural products associated with colonial regimes are not just occasioned by them, as their reflection or shadow, but actively participate in their operation, by articulating their ideological basis.’⁶ One of the earliest examples he cites is of William Hodges (1713–82), acknowledged as the first picturesque artist in India, who arrived aboard Captain Cooke’s ship in the 18th century and followed Warren Hastings (1732–1818), the Governor General, through his conquest of mainly Madras and Calcutta, depicting the scenery as they went along.

Fig. 3a William Hodges
‘A View of the City of Benares,
Upon the Ganges’ from *Select Views
in India*

Aquatint, 24 February 1787,
290 x 453 mm
The Alkazi Collection of
Photography

Fig. 3b William Hodges
‘A View of the Great Pagoda at
Tanjore’ from *Select Views in India*

Aquatint, 24 February 1787,
292 x 456 mm
The Alkazi Collection of
Photography

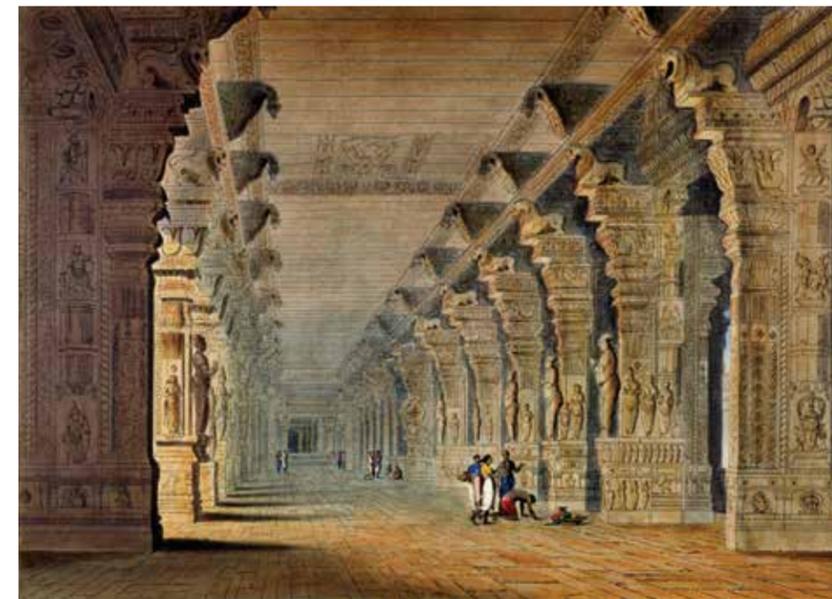


Fig. 4a Thomas Daniell
‘Part of the Palace in the Fort of
Allahabad’ from *Oriental Scenery*

Coloured Aquatint,
September 1795, 434 x 602 mm
The Alkazi Collection of
Photography

Fig. 4b Thomas and William Daniell
‘Tremal Naig’s Choultry, Madura’
from *Oriental Scenery*

Coloured Aquatint,
November 1798, 422 x 602 mm
The Alkazi Collection of
Photography

His ‘views’ of Benares and Tanjore, for instance, present the same lyrical quality as those of the Daniell brothers who followed in his stead (Figs 3a and 3b). Like Hodges, the Daniells (Thomas and William) too created a significant archive of aquatints, titled *Oriental Scenery* (1804), a cross-section of temporal, geographical, cultural and social perspectives that were meant as an ‘unveiling’ of India.⁷ Their extraordinary prints, especially those of the exterior of the temple in Allahabad, the interior of the one in Madura and of the landscape view across the Ganges present a distinct continuation of the imagery adopted by Hodges (Figs 4a and 4b) maintaining an undertone of classical culture—a legacy perhaps from Greece and Rome.

Together with the cultural fascination with space, the political landscape was conditioned immensely by the consideration of India as a land of resources, both physical and material—with vast quantities of cotton, silk, indigo and opium, it yielded great returns for those who decided to invest in it. By the 1860s, these resources were well integrated in the British production process in places such as Lancashire, known for its cotton manufacturing. By the end of the 19th century, Britain was the foremost industrialized country in the world. Yet early forays into India were accompanied by an actual mapping of the colony, a surveying technique in which the landscape became an agent of ideas and ideologies that needed to be controlled in order to be an integral part of the colonial experience. The coming of photography at a later stage relies heavily on this process of aestheticization and fetishization of the landscape as a European model of encounter. The accommodation of particular local facets, leads to a kind of ‘Indian picturesque’ as the critical theorist Prof. Zahid Chaudhary indicates, in which the British find themselves implanted within a situation slightly different from the one in Britain.⁸

On the other hand, in Europe, as the Industrial Revolution altered the traditions of rural life, the old hierarchy of the Picturesque began to crumble, yet in colonies such as India, it