



Prahlad Bubbar

PIONEER PHOTOGRAPHERS IN INDIA:
LINNAEUS TRIPE AND JOHN MURRAY
1855-65

April 2020



A COLLECTION OF SIX IMPORTANT
PHOTOGRAPHS BY LINNÆUS TRIPE

LINNAEUS TRIPE

Linnaeus Tripe was born in England in 1822, joining as captain of the British army in India where he arrived in 1839 as a recruit of the East Indian Company. Having developed the knowledge and technical skills required for the practice of photography in England, it was in India that Tripe took on this endeavour with all seriousness. He became one of the earliest and most notable photographers in the Subcontinent.

In his brief career as photographer, from 1854 to 1860, he was appointed official photographer by British authorities. Tripe embarked on several photographic expeditions – to Mysore, Burma, and the Madras Presidency –, he also opened his own photography studio. This was a time in which, responding to a sense of responsibility for the preservation of India's great monuments, as well as having the political need to acquire deep knowledge of the regions under its power, the colonial administration began to fund photographic surveys.

Tripe's series of photographs of the monuments, archaeological sites and landscapes of these regions constitute an invaluable document of India's cultural and religious heritage. However, his images far surpass their documental facet, as they reflect a highly sophisticated aesthetic and demonstrate creative technical skills. The deep artistic vision that Tripe endowed his images with is seen in the particular choices of viewpoints, use of perspective and a strong graphic sense in the play of light and shadows, further dramatised by the use of negative retouching.

Following a particularly troubled political time in India, which he helped document, Tripe eventually closed down his studio in 1860 and practically ceased all photographic activity.

1. The Western Gopuram, Meenakshi Temple, Madura
Madura, circa 1856-57. Albumenised salt print. 38.1 x 30.5 cm.

Provenance: London art market, 1981; Private collection, UK, 1981 to present.





2. Temple Study, Madura

Madura, circa 1858
Albumen print from a waxed paper negative.
34.3 x 26.9 cm.

Provenance:
Newberry Library Collection;
Sotheby's New York, 31 October 1989;
With Weston Gallery, California.



3. Tanjore, Great Pagoda, West and South sides of the basement of the Bimanuni. Tanjore, circa 1856-57. Albumenised salt print from a waxed paper negative. 27.6 x 36.2 x cm.
Provenance: Newberry Library Collection; Sotheby's New York, 31 October 1989; Weston Gallery, California; Private collection, UK.

4. The Puthu Mandapam: Entrance to the
Nave from the Western Portico

1858.
Albumen print.
35 x 27 cm.

Provenance:
Private collection, UK.





5. Entrance to the Temple of Minakshi in the Great Pagoda 1858. Albumen print from a waxed paper negative. 31.8 x 36.8 cm.
Provenance: The Paul Walter Collection; Christie's London, Visions of India, 5th June 1996, lot 248; Private collection, UK.



6. South Façade of the Quadrangle of the Nayak Durbar Hall, Madura Circa 1856-57. Albumenised salt print. 27.3 x 34.3 cm.
Provenance: Private collection, UK.

FOUR PHOTOGRAPHS BY
DR JOHN MURRAY, AGRA



DR JOHN MURRAY

Dr John Murray was one of the most talented early amateur photographers in India, taking up photography from around 1849, and developing a prolific practice until 1865, a time when commercial photography had just become a settled practice.

Murray, a Scottish-born who had come to India in 1833 as a civil surgeon and was to become Principal of the Medical School in Agra, used photography to capture Mughal monuments and landscapes in and around Agra, Delhi and Fatehpur Sikri in North India. His photographic work was driven by a desire to test and master technical aspects of this newly invented medium, using the technique of the Calotype, with large waxed paper negatives to produce expressive and stark prints. Murray accomplished this by all the while reflecting an aesthetic sensibility often influenced by the idealised romanticism of the Picturesque, a movement characteristic of British painting of the late 18th century that found particular expression in India through the paintings of William Hodges and Thomas and William Daniell.

Murray often returned to the same subjects in his photographs, creating images of monuments from different points of view, sometimes only slightly shifting, as to document in detail all the different architectural features of the buildings. This process was also a way for him to experiment with and test the possibilities of photography, and to focus his attention on the dynamics of light and shadow as reflected by architecture. These are captivating images that arrest the viewer's eye in the interlacing of the monumental solidity of architecture and the atmospheric evanescence of light.



7. Agra Fort: Eastern Porch of the Jahangiri Mahal Agra, India, circa 1858-62. Albumen print from a waxed paper negative. 38.4 x 43.2 cm.
Provenance: Dr. John Murray, and by descent; Private collection, UK.



8. The Turkish Sultanas House at Fatehpur Sikri Fatehpur Sikri, India, circa 1858-62. Albumen print from a waxed paper negative. 34.9 x 44.8 cm.
Provenance: Dr. John Murray, and by descent; Sotheby's, London, Early photographs of India/ The Archive of Dr. John Murray, 18 June 1999, lot 46.



9. The Taj Mahal Agra, India, circa 1850. Albumen print from waxed paper negative. 38.4 x 43.2 cm.
Provenance: From the family Archives of John Murray.



10. The Hall of Private Audience, Agra Agra, circa 1858-62. Albumen print from a waxed paper negative. 38.1 x 44.5 cm.
Provenance: From the family Archives of John Murray.

Photographs by Linnaeus Tripe and
John Murray are in the following Museum
collections and some private collections:

Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY
Museum of Modern Art, NY
Victoria and Albert Museum, London
Cleveland Museum of Art
The National Gallery of Art, Washington
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

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