



John Falconer

Under Indian Skies

19th-Century Photographs from a Private Collection

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Under Indian Skies is the book behind the forthcoming exhibition of the same name, which opens at The David Collection on 23 November 2018. The book — and the exhibition — offer a previously unknown, first-hand impression of 19th-century India, as seen through the eyes of primarily Western photographers.

At the beginning of the 1850s photography made its breakthrough in colonial India. With its impressive architecture, exotic landscapes and many different ethnic groups and cultures, the country offered fantastic motifs. The Indian architecture with its magnificent Islamic palaces and mausolea. Princes, maharajas, ministers and soldiers in all of their splendour. But also ordinary people and daily life: stone-cutters and woodcarvers, carpenters and dyers, daily life with the elephants that bathe in the Ganges, cotton harvesters and gardeners, acrobats, snake charmers, dancers, musicians and religious processions.

In the book we are led all the way back to the conception and early years of photography, just before 1850, and right up until around 1900, when the medium was long established. What is more, the book includes what may well be the first examples of war photography — the ruins and corpses left behind after a large, bloody uprising in the end of the 1850s, triggered when the British forced local Hindu and Muslim troops to use cartridges greased with the fat of cows and pigs. The photographers travelling to India to undertake ‘reportage’ photography were akin to explorers and their journeys were difficult expeditions, during which with great effort — and an army of helpers — they surveyed the remotest regions. The photographs of the first decades were composed in much the same way as paintings from the same period. The technical challenges were immense and exposure times, for instance, were extremely long, so everything had to be planned to the smallest detail.

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Under Indian Skies presents a riveting, kaleidoscopic picture of an India that for the most part has disappeared today. Some monuments are still standing and one might still see similar scenes there, but the present infrastructure and political circumstances are completely different to that time.

In addition to the presentation of eighty-three selected photographs, the book contains two essays, on the history of photography in India and early photographic processes respectively.

About the Author

John Falconer is a British historian of photography, who for many years was responsible for the photography collection at the British Library's Indian and Oriental departments. He has written many books on early Indian photography and is one of the world's leading specialists in this area.

Information and Contact

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Cover page, photographs and further information are available to download at: www.strandbergpublishing.dk/presse

