



ALKAZI FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS

NEW DELHI, INDIA

About Photography

AFA Newsletter Vol. 2, September 2009



Frontiers of Photography: Early Explorations of the Camera

Annexe Auditorium, IIC Annexe, Lodhi Estate, New Delhi- 110003.

Wednesday, 16 September 2009

10.30 a.m.- 6.00 p.m.

Frontiers of Photography: Early Explorations of the Camera is the second in a series of talks organised by the Alkazi Foundation for the Arts in collaboration with the India International Centre. It engages with aspects of photographic history and practice that lie outside the dominant narratives of its nineteenth century chronicling, as a means to explore stories of maverick practitioners, intriguing patrons and varied genres of photographic documentation.

Reverberations of photographic representation influences several discursive and visual fields. These include the documentation of outlying regions of the British Indian state, the dissemination of photographs and alternative forms of mechanical reproduction, all of which fall within the ambit of an actual and conceptual 'frontier', a space that is encountered, confronted and then transgressed. Equally important are practices that anticipate future trends in photography and those that engage with the notion of identity. The Seminar seeks to address the range of modernities initiated by the camera and reflects upon its exposure to a wider viewership.



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Framed, Fashioned, Domesticated: How Early Photography Shaped Kashmir as a Frontier Zone

Ananya Jahanara Kabir

In 1857, the Dogra Kingdom of Jammu and Kashmir was constituted as one of the many princely states embedded within British India; the 1850s was also when cameras first entered Jammu and Kashmir. The following paper focuses on the shaping of this region as a frontier zone, for both British India and modernity, by imperial adventurers armed with the camera and the technological alchemy it represented.



Samuel Bourne
Kangra Bridge & Fort
Albumen print, 1864
ACP: 96.21.0001-00007



Samuel Bourne
Kashmir Valley
Albumen print, 1864
ACP: D2003.39.0002



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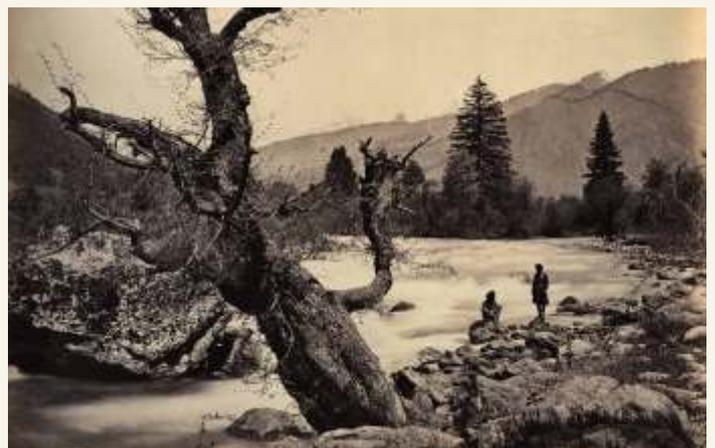
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Framed, Fashioned, Domesticated: How Early Photography Shaped Kashmir as a Frontier Zone contd.



Baker & Burke
Group of Bultees, Maharaja's Highlanders,
Srinagar, Kashmir
Albumen print, 1862-68
ACP: 96.21.0001-00127

Drawing substantially on the Alkazi Collection of Photography, the talk will demonstrate how photography and its associated display and consumption-practices framed, fashioned but also ultimately domesticated the Princely State's dramatic geography—centering on the fabled Vale of Kashmir with its lakes and surrounding mountain ranges, but also engaging ancient monuments and contemporary craft practices. Early photography was thus instrumental in extracting, from Jammu and Kashmir, 'Kashmir' as a space of adventure, fantasy, antiquity and subjective representation—an inheritance that we now know to be as deeply ambivalent as it was deeply influential.



William Baker
Gunneshbul', photographer's ref. 1141
Albumen print, 1864-68
ACP: 94.04.0016



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Frontier Modalities: Photography and the Representation of Communities in Northeast India

Akshaya Tankha

The visual documentation of communities in Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal and Assam from the mid 19th Century onwards presents a fascinating case study in the history of British ethnographic photography in India. The camera formed one of the principal means to facilitate the collection of information about people in the Northeastern frontier. This paper highlights an altered deployment of the photographic mode, which often viewed its image as far too 'real', for visualising communities in the region within a reified class of meaning and interpretation.



Print, Hanhart Lith.;
Photographer, Dr. Benjamin Simpson
Chulikata Mishmi Chief in full Dress
Lithographic Plate, c.1860-70
ACP: 96.20.0044-00006



Dr. Robert Brown
Manipuri (married woman)
Albumen print, c.1870
ACP: 96.20.0098



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Frontier Modalities: Photography and the representation of communities in Northeast India
contd.



Unknown Photographer
Singpho. Warlike Frontier Tribe.
Southern Frontier of Assam
Albumen print, 1860s
ACP: D2005.88.0001-00029

By drawing on the narratives of the earliest photographic inroads into the region, the talk shows how there emerged a visual aesthetic suited to showcase tribal communities as 'archaic'. While this appeared to be somewhat at odds with the representation of communities in other parts of the country, it compared favourably with other contexts of ethnographic images of tribes and material culture across the colonial Empire. Used in travel accounts, ethnographic studies as well as exhibitions, this trend had a significant impact on how people from the region were imagined and viewed.



Unknown Engraver;
Sketch, Lieutenant R. G. Woodthorpe
Looshais on the Frontier of Bengal
Lithograph, 1872
ACP



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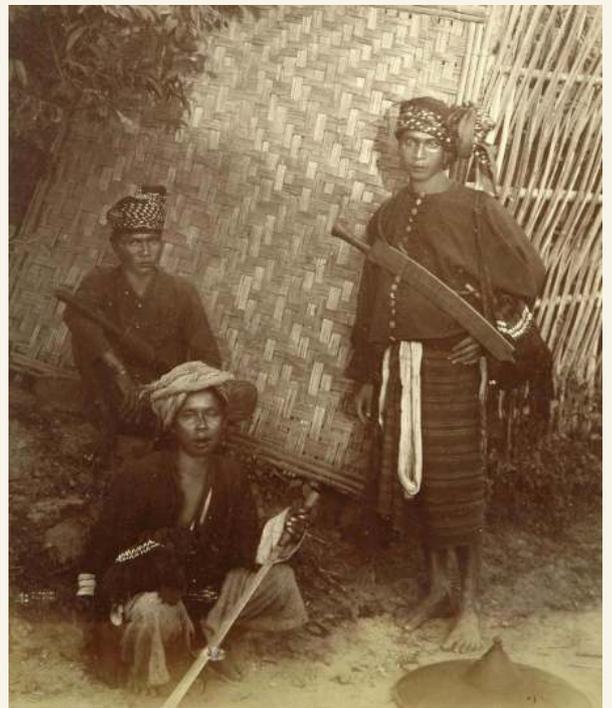
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Beyond Borders: Felice Beato in Asia Meha Desai

A pioneering 'war photographer' in the nineteenth century, Felice Beato (1833/34 – 1907), was one of the first commercial practitioners to travel to Asia. His body of work explores as many countries and cultures as it does subjects and genres. Beato wielded his camera in Crimea, India, China, Sudan, Korea and Japan before arriving in Burma. The Burma years are significant for the transformation they bring about in Beato's oeuvre only hinted at while in Japan. This transition from the battlefield to the studio forms a central thread in this talk, through which the extensive repertoire of a maverick photographer is explored.



Felice Beato
Group of Kachins
Albumen print, 1880s -90s
ACP: 94.74.0013



Felice Beato
Hindoo Rao's House – Mutiny Site,
Delhi, India
Albumen print, c. 1858
ACP: 95.0027-00004



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Beyond Borders: Felice Beato in Asia contd.



Felice Beato
Unidentified View, Japan
Hand-tinted Albumen print, 1870s
ACP: 2000.28.0116

Beato was a pioneer in many ways – the geographical and subject range in his work addresses his dynamic use of the camera. During his time in Japan, he introduced the hand tinted Albumen print, which would go on to become typical of the region over the years. His various portfolios attest to his skill both on the war field and in the photographer's studio. By taking a closer look at these images, this talk examines Beato's vital role as a chronicler of history – of different times and spaces.



Felice Beato
Tung Chow Pagoda, China
Albumen print, 23rd September 1860
ACP: 2001.06.0004 - 00009



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Pictures in the Post: Delhi in Early 20th Century Postcards Deepasri Baul and Anish Vanaik

Postcards were amongst the most fascinating ways in which photography came to intersect with the 'intimate' in the 20th century. The images of people, architecture and landscape on postcards functioned in different ways. In a colonial context they may be read closely to reveal the complexities of colonial mentalities and politics. This paper will make enquiries into the ways in which the city of Delhi was imagined, commemorated and its myths constructed, through a close reading of postcards containing 'views' of the city, produced in the early 20th century.



H.A. Mirza & Sons
Verso of "Street scene with
clock tower, Delhi
B/W postcard, c. 1907
ACP: 2001.15.0567



H.A. Mirza & Sons
Jantar Mantar or Observatory, Delhi (India)
Collotype, c. 1920s
ACP: 95.0121-00053



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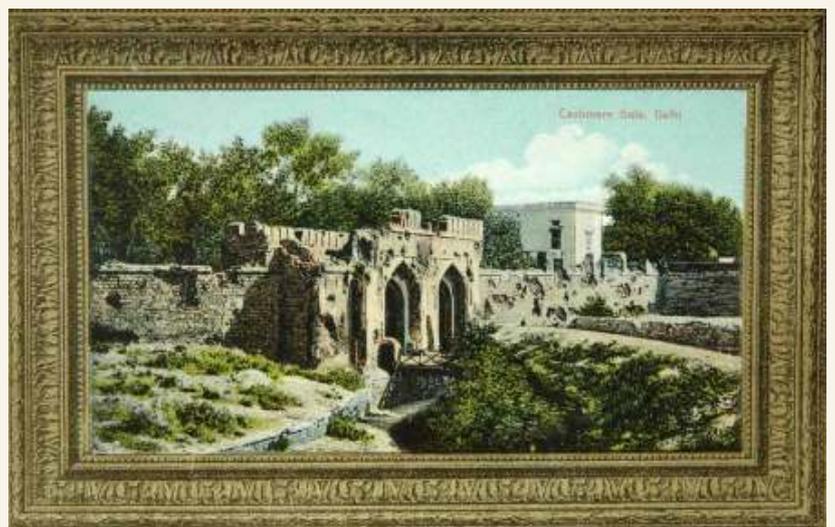
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Pictures in the Post: Delhi in early 20th century postcards contd.



H.A. Mirza & Sons
Safdar Jung Tomb, Delhi (India)
Collotype, c. 1920s
ACP: 95.0121-00054

Through a close look at Delhi, this paper will delve into the theme of picture postcards as composite cultural artefacts from the past, which produce layered, multiple meanings. Images in postcards were selected according to previous photographic traditions, economic diktats of tourism and the celebration of a narrative about colonial supremacy, all of which now entered the space of personal communication. By closely studying the juxtaposition of images and text, this paper unravels the threads of economics, visual politics, photographic practice and emotional investment that were woven together to create these seemingly simple pictures in the post.



Moorli Dhur & Sons
Cashmere Gate, Delhi
Colour postcard, c. 1910s
ACP: 2001.15.0570



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The Picture Book: Analysing 2 Wedding Albums from the Kapurthala Royal Family Suryanandini Sinha

Albums present visual histories of a revelatory nature, substantiating but also offering fresh narratives in relation to text. In the manner in which photographs are taken, arranged and later viewed in this format, it is possible to discern the character of the compiler, the protocols of patronage and the perceptions of private vs. public persona. This talk examines the possibility of interpretation, imagination, and factual reconstruction of unwritten but visualized histories enclosed within the photographic album through a case study of two albums of the Kapurthala royal family from the early twentieth century.



Frederick Bremner
The Raja and Rani of Mandi
Gelatin Silver print, 1923
ACP: 95.0010 – 00017



Unkown Photographer
His Highness and his family, from
the Rani of Mandi's Wedding Album
Gelatin Silver print, 1923
ACP: 95.0010-00007



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The Picture Book: Analysing 2 Wedding Albums from the Kapurthala Royal Family contd.



GL Manuel Freres

Autographed portrait of Princess
Brinda, Maharani of Kapurthala
Gelatin silver print, 1930s
ACP: D2008.07.0005-00037

The paper sheds light on the lives of three women united in kinship and beauty, yet seemingly far apart in character. Pressed between the leaves of these albums the images offer possible conversations, aided by the biographies and fictional accounts that exist about them today. It is significant that both these albums are documents of a rite of passage considered pivotal to a woman's life: her wedding, making each photographic image rich with personal memory as with royal splendour of ceremony.



Unknown Photographer
The Sikh Marriage Ceremony,
from the Kapurthala Wedding Album
Platinum print, 1910
ACP: 98.57.0001-00009



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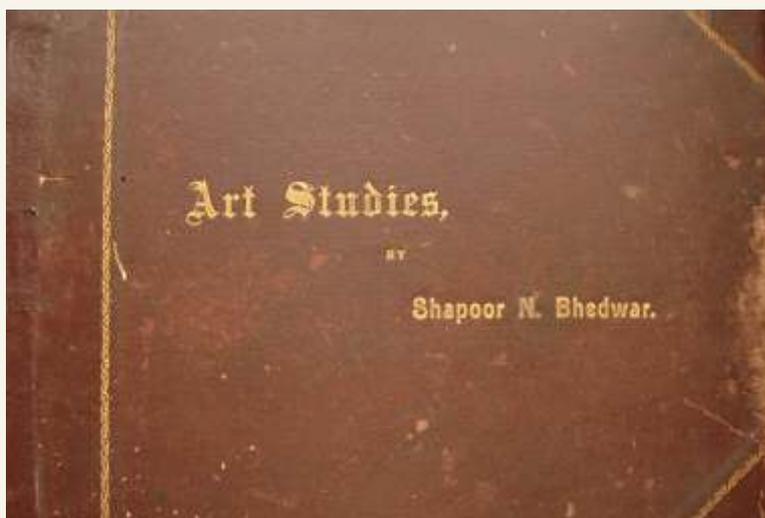
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Art Studies: Exploring a Performance Album Rahaab Allana

Art Studies, a private photographic album in the Alkazi Collection, is perhaps one of the first Indo-European theatrical stylizations in photography. It is a compilation of images including Europeans and Indians, heavily stylised in manners and gestures with stereotypical poses, and, towards the end of the album, a staged performance piece in photographic form, one that has both painterly or specific artistic precedents. The talk suggests that this is perhaps one of the first 'Performance' albums in India, connecting theatre and pictorial mannerisms with the studio space.



Shapoor N. Bhedwar
Renunciation Series,
Tyag No 1-Weary sits the Yogi-Raj
Carbon print, 1890s
ACP: 97.47.0001-00012



Shapoor N. Bhedwar
Art Studies, cover
Half-calf, Morocco binding,
Gilt tooled & titled, 1890s
ACP: 97.47.0001



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Art Studies: Exploring a Performance Album contd.



Shapoor N. Bhedwar
Butterflies
Carbon print, 1890s
ACP: 97.47.0001-00026

The talk presents the opposite of the everyday that distinctly enters photography in the late 19th Century in India through this rare album, produced in the 1890s in Bombay. The photographer for this particular project was a very prominent Parsi gentleman, Shapoor N. Bhedwar. Bhedwar travelled to London in the late 19th Century, and his work received the highest regard and several awards, including the Bombay Art Exhibition medal in 1892. His success as a photographer is melded with his innovative zest to evolve a new platform for the perception of photography as an 'art' practice.



Shapoor N. Bhedwar
Gool Guli- A Rose Bud
Carbon print, 1890s
ACP: 97.47.0001-00002