The New Medium:

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Prahlad Bubbar

33 Cork Street
Mayfair, London
W1S 3NQ

+44 (0)20 7494 3144

www.prahladbubbar.com
info@prahladbubbar.com

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The miraculous ability to fix light upon a surface, capturing reflections of the natural world and preserving moments in time, heralded a revolution in image making. India was at the forefront of this process; as early as January 1940, Thacker and Co. of Calcutta advertised the sale of daguerreotype cameras, just one year after their invention in France. Amateur photographers raced to experiment with the new medium, inspired by the abundance of India's wild landscapes, majestic architecture and diverse people. These 'endless objects of attraction or of curiosity' were extolled by Captain Harry Barr at the inaugural meeting of the Photographic Society of Bombay in 1854: 'where I would ask, can that art be more advantageously studied than under the sunny skies of Ind?'[1]

While little is known of the earliest practitioners of photography in India, from the 1850s we have clear evidence of its increasingly widespread use. Photographic societies appeared in the Presidency cities of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. With these societies developed communities that organised events, exhibitions and the publication of journals, fostering an active culture of experimentation and exchange. Photography's potential was recognised by the colonial government early on, who foresaw its use in the archeological, military, scientific and ethnographic domains.

One of the most talented early amateurs was Dr. John Murray (nos. 1 & 4). A teacher and Principal of the Medical School in Agra, Murray took up photography around 1849. He is known for his images of the sublime Mughal monuments of Delhi, Agra and Fatephur Sikri. A selection of his prints was published in 1857 by Hogarth, London, under the title *Photographic Views of Agra and its Vicinity*.

Image 1 is likely to be from this series, taken prior to his trip to England that year. In this view of the Taj, Murray's vision is less documentary and more pictorial, presenting the surrounding gardens as a plentiful and tranquil idyll. Early photographs of India were often influenced by the idealised romanticism of the Picturesque, a movement that had characterised British painting of the late 18th century and found particular expression in India through the paintings of William Hodges and Thomas and William Daniell.

Responding to a sense of responsibility for the preservation of India's great monuments, the colonial administration began to fund photographic surveys. The images attributable to W. G. Pigou in the present exhibition date from this early period of government sponsored documentation (nos. 2 & 3). Pigou, a surgeon in the Bombay Medical Service and keen amateur photographer, replaced Captain T. Biggs of the Bombay Artillery as Photographer to the Government of the Bombay Presidency in 1856. He visited the sites of Vijayanagar, Mysore, Seringapatam and Halebid from 1856-7 and his work was published with that of Biggs and Andrew Neill in *Architecture of Dharwar and Mysore* in 1866.

The desire to document and record also extended to sites of military interest. Photography had come to India at a time of renewed colonial expansion, particularly following the uprising of 1857. Returning to India in November of that year, John Murray was asked by the Governor-General Lord Canning to photograph locations associated with the uprising, including Benares, Kanpur and Delhi. A large and impressive image in this exhibition depicting pyramids of canon balls in front of the Pearl mosque at Agra was taken during this period, presenting a striking juxtaposition of two symbols of faith and war (no. 4).

As the 1850s progressed, increasing numbers of amateur photographers opened commercial studios. William Johnson, a founding member of the Bombay Photographic Society, went into collaboration with William Henderson in the mid 1850s (no. 5). Together they produced a monthly journal illustrated with albumen prints called the *Indian Amateurs Photographic Album* from 1856-58. Another amateur turned professional was Henry Hinton, a teacher based in Bombay (no. 6). His work was included in the *Indian Amateurs Photographic Album* in 1857 and he ran a photographic studio in Bombay until 1872.

The sites of South India were captured masterfully in the work of John and James Nicholas, who collaborated as 'Nicholas Brothers, Photographers of Madras'. Their studio was established in 1863 and they focused predominately on South Indian landscape, architecture and ethnographic subjects, demonstrating a nuanced engagement with Hindu, as well as Muslim, sites (no. 12).

Some of their finest work was done in Mysore, an example of which is the majestic image of the tomb of Tipu Sultan, the 'Mysore Tiger', and his father Haider Ali (no.10). Sites associated with Tipu were of particular interest to the British, who viewed him as a formidable and worthy opponent in the Mysore wars of the late 18th century.

Indians also played an important role as pioneers in the early decades of photography. Undoubtedly the most widely known and celebrated example is Raja Deen Dayal. Born in Sardhana near Meerut in 1844, Dayal studied surveying at the Thomson Civil Engineering College at Roorkee before getting a job at the Public Works Department of the Central India Agency. He took up photography around 1874 and his work soon attracted the attention of the establishment, notably Sir Lepel Griffin, with whom he toured Bundelkhand in 1882. Image no. 13, an exquisite print of the famed temple of Khajuraho, dates to this early period in Dayal's career.

A remarkably gifted photographer and astute businessman, Dayal climbed the ranks from aspiring amateur to become official photographer to the sixth Nizam of Hyderabad, the wealthiest princely state in India. He navigated 19th century society with great skill, operating amongst the British and Indian elites and crossing class, race and social divides. Having established a successful business with studios in Indore, Hyderabad and Bombay, he was granted the Royal Warrant from Queen Victoria in 1887. His work is known for its sophisticated gradation of tone, often achieved by using different lengths of exposure for selective areas of the print. In addition to his technical skill, the artistic merit of his photographs was recognised by his contemporaries. On his death in 1905, the *Bombay Gazette* described Dayal as 'the first great photographer and artist'.[2]

Another significant result of the arrival of photography in India was the evolution of the photographic portrait, rivalling miniature painting as the primary medium for historical documentation and the presentation of power and prestige. Early portraiture was predominately ethnographic or focused on courtly elites. A fine example is Dayal's image of the Maharaja of Bijawar (Central India) (nos. 14 & 15). The negative number confirms a date of 1882, during his tour in Bundelkhand. The camera frame extends beyond the temporary studio, which has been crafted from a dark fabric backdrop and layered carpets, revealing the architecture behind. Direct and formal, this image draws on a long tradition of court painting in India in which the ruler is pictured surrounded by his court and defined by markers of princely wealth and status.

From the 1890s onwards portraits were influenced by an increasing trend towards pictorialism, coupled with a Victorian regard for high ceremony. This was inspired in part by trends in European painting, contributing a greater degree of lyricism and emotional sentiment to portrait photography. A significant factor in this process was the development of the photographer's studio. Portraits acquired props such as European furniture, elaborate backdrops, flowers and rich drapery. The studio became a place of transformation, where identities could be created and status proclaimed.

Two portraits in the exhibition illustrate this progression during the early 1890s. A young Maharaja Sardar Singh of Jodhpur (no. 18), photographed by Johnston and Hoffmann, leans with charming elegance against the arm of a European-style chair. Behind him is a painted backdrop, although barely visible in the print. Image 19 dates from 1894 and was taken in Raja Deen Dayal's studio in Indore. Here three princes, possibly from Gwalior, sit before an elaborately painted vista on leather chairs with ornamental drapery and flowers. Images of children were a particular test for the photographer, who needed to ensure that there was as little movement during exposure as possible.

Dayal's striking portrait of the Maharaja of Bundi, taken in 1903, embodies further theatricality (no. 22). It is particularly evocative, his direct, frontal gaze giving the image an iconic feel. The depiction of a ruler on a traditional Indian throne with his sword and shield in his lap, conceived with limited spatial depth and areas of solid, even tone, recalls earlier conventions of painted portraiture. The white of the prince's tunic is luminous and the soft haze around his head appears to glow like the auras of Mughal and Rajput halos in Indian miniature paintings. Photographic techniques are manipulated here to further the impression of princely glory.

A rare collection of images of the Holkars of Indore, a family known for their impeccable style, demonstrates the transition of court photography into the 20th century. The Holkars were a Maratha dynasty that ruled the state of Indore in Madhya Pradesh, Central India. In a photograph by Ramchandra and Pratap Rao (active 1890s-1930s), who worked as the State Photographers in Indore, the Maharaja Tukoji Rao Holkar III is the epitome of princely elegance, the drapery of his clothes reminiscent of early fashion photography (no. 24).

Tukoji's first wife Chandrawati Holkar and daughter Manorama Raje, both seated, appear in a group portrait inscribed with the stamp of Devare's Art

Studio, Bombay (no. 25). Behind them stands Indira Devi of Cooch Behar, the famed beauty and socialite who defied convention to marry for love. This image demonstrates the continued influence of pictorialism and lyrical sentimentality. The women gaze intensely into the camera's lens and are styled against an ornately painted backdrop of a palatial interior and highly romanticised garden vista. It is also significant as a demonstration of the increased visibility of women in photographs from the turn of the century onwards, as changing attitudes and social reform led to a relaxation of the traditional restrictions of purdah.

The exhibition concludes with Tukoji's son, Yeshwantrao Holkar II (r.1926 – 1961), photographed by the legendary American artist Man Ray (no. 26). Yeshwantrao was a great patron of the European avant-garde, commissioning work from designers such as Eckart Muthesius, Brancusi, Emile Jacque Ruhlmann and Le Corbusier. This elegant and highly personal image is symbolic of the growing influence of modernism as well the increased cultural exchange between India and the West. It is also a poignant glimpse into a world of princely splendor that was soon to be no more.

The photographs in this exhibition illustrate significant aspects of the development of early photography in India. They act as a windows into the past, preserving moments lost in time. In Europe, the discovery of photography engendered a debate in which many decried its lack of artistic merit in relation to painting. This was not the case in India. As noted by Samuel Bourne, one of the foremost photographers of the subcontinent during the 1860s, early photography in India was considered one of the 'fine arts'[3]. The creative vision of these early practitioners is evident here, from the idyllic architectural views of the 1850s to the emotive portraiture of the early 20th century. Photographers drew on multiple influences, past and present, in the development of a new medium through which image making was transformed.

[1] *Journal of the Photographic Society of Bombay*, no. 1 (January 1855).
[2] *Bombay Gazette* (7 July 1905), p. 3.
[3] Samuel Bourne, 'Ten Weeks With the Camera in the Himalayas', *British Journal of Photography* (15 February, 1864), p. 70.

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1 Dr. John Murray. *Gardens of the Taj Mahal*. Agra, circa 1856. Albumen print, 37.8 x 43.4 cm.

2

Dr. William Henry Pigou. *Mysore: Gateway of Temple in the City.*
Karnataka, circa 1856. Albumen print, 36.2 x 26.6 cm.

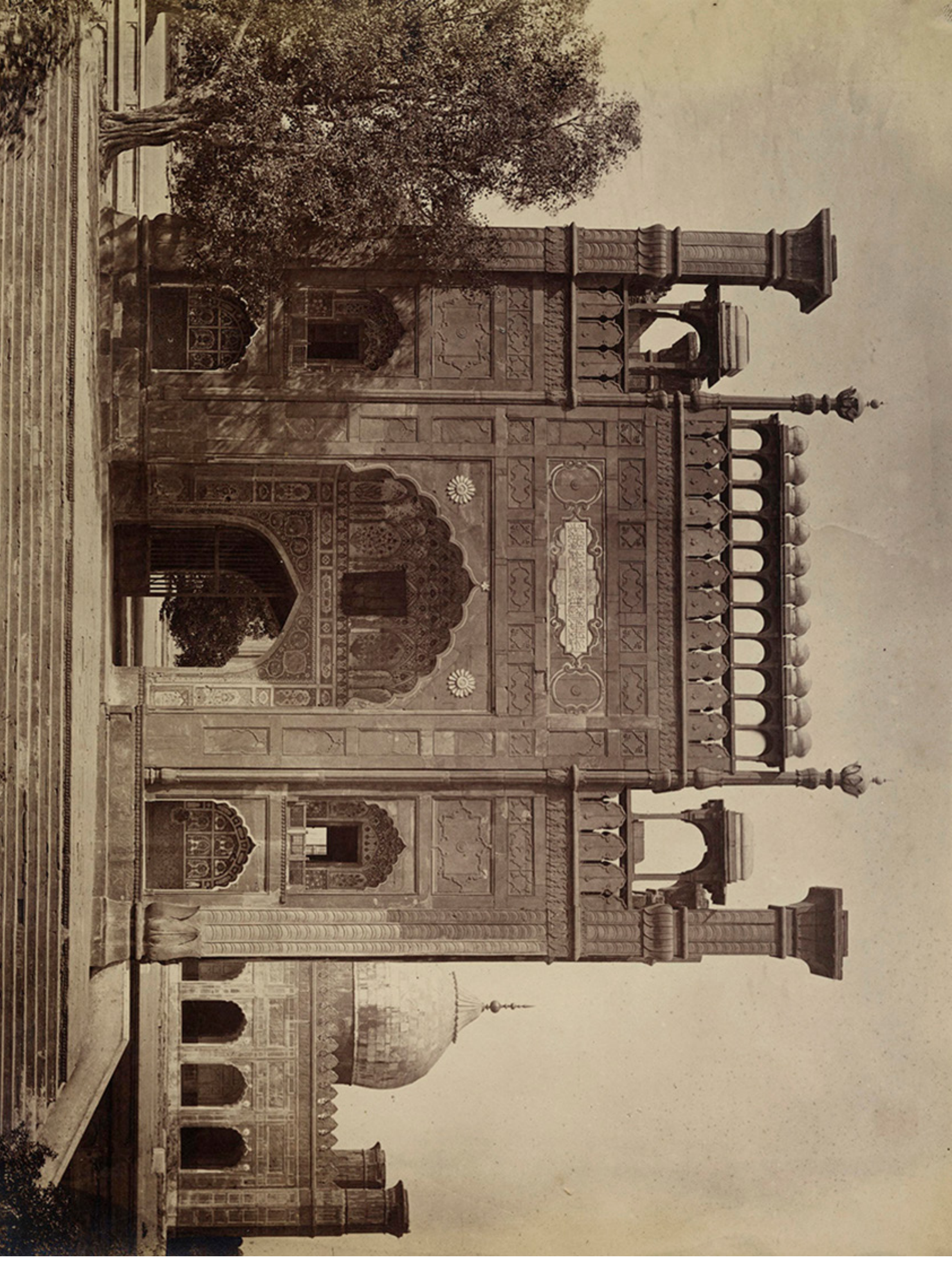
3 Dr. William Henry Pigou. *Hullabeed: The Great Temple, Southern Door in East Front*. Karnataka, circa 1856. Albumen print, 26.5 x 38 cm.

4 Dr. John Murray. *The Arsenal and the Pearl Mosque*. Agra, circa 1858. Albumen print, 35.5 x 42.6cm.

5 William Johnson. *No. 176 – Caves of Karlie: No.1. The Approach. Johnson's Photographs of Western India*. 1855-62. Albumen print, 19 x 24.3 cm.

6 Henry Hinton Studio, Bombay. *Elora – Interior – Indra Subha - The Assembly Hall of the Chief of the Gods – Indrany seated on a lion*. Maharashtra, circa 1860. Albumen print, 17.2 x 22.7 cm.

7 Anon. *The Golden Temple at Amritsar*. 1860s. Albumen print, 20 x 27 cm.



8 Anon. *Lahore: Gate of Jamu Masjid Mosque*. 1860s. Albumen print, 21 x 27.5 cm.

9 Frith's Series, attributed to Oscar Mallitte. *Banyan Tree in Botanical Gardens, Calcutta*. Calcutta, circa 1870. Albumen print, 15.3 x 20.4 cm.

10 Nicholas Bros. *Seringapatam. Mausoleum Erected over Tippoo Sultan and Hayder Ali*. 1870s. Albumen print, 22 x 27 cm.

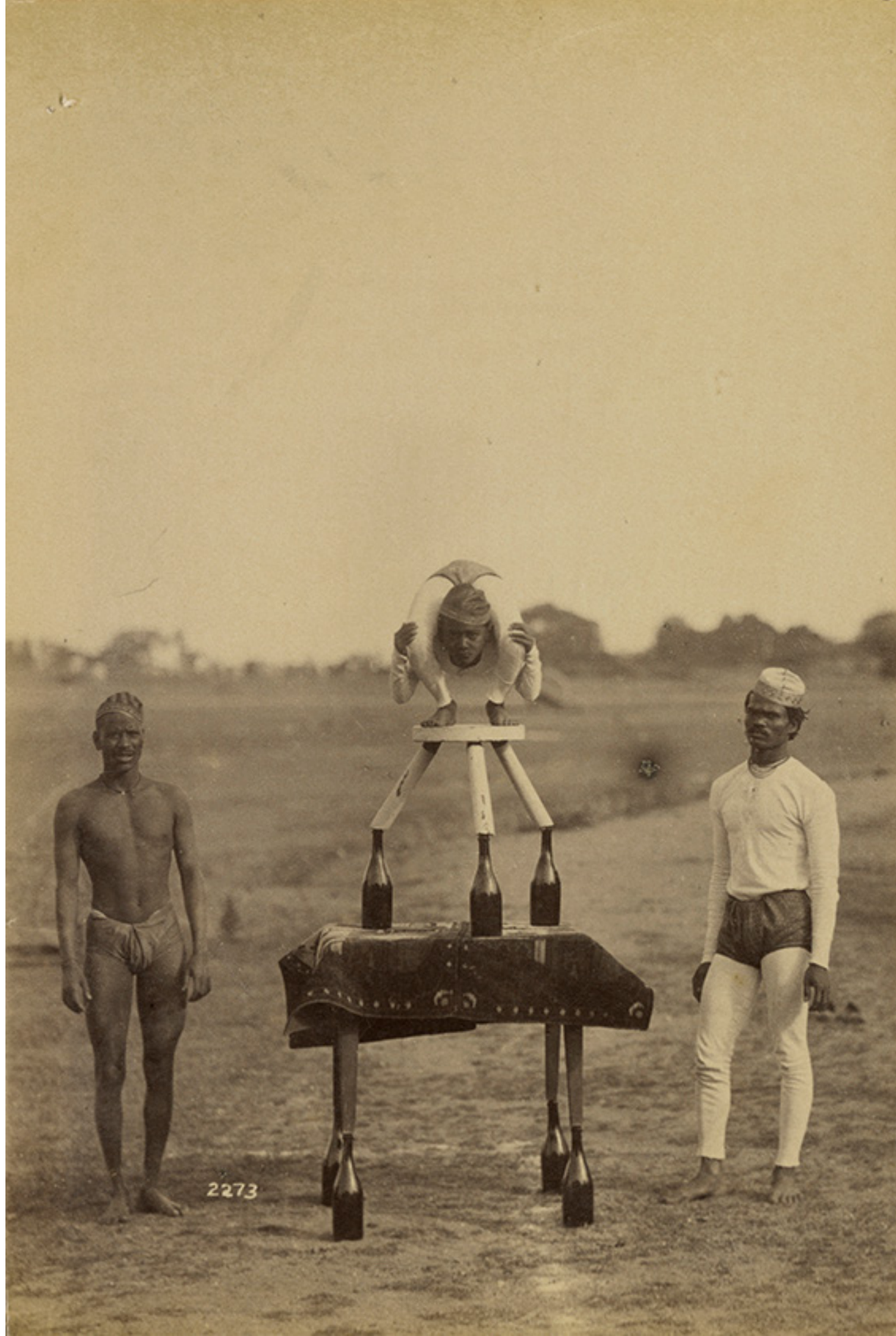
11 Nicholas Bros. *The Qutb Shahi Tombs.* Golconda, circa 1870s. Albumen print, 23 x 29.7 cm.

12 Nicholas Bros. *Madura, no. 6. A Passage in the Temple (Kilipputtu Muntapam)*. 1878. Albumen print, 23.5 x 28.5 cm.

13 Raja Deen Dayal. *Ancient Temple at Khajraha (Bundelkhand)*. Central India, circa 1882. Albumen print, 13.4 x 20.4 cm.

14 Raja Deen Dayal. *Maharaja Bhan Pratap Singh of Bijawar*. Central India, circa 1882. Albumen print, 19.5 x 26.5 cm.

15 Raja Deen Dayal. *The Maharaja of Bijawar, with European Chairs*. Central India, circa 1882. Albumen print, 19 x 27 cm.



16 Raja Deen Dayal. *Dewas Athletes*. Circa 1885. Albumen print, 14.6 x 10 cm.

17 Raja Deen Dayal. *An Elderly Man Seated*. India, circa 1887-88. Albumen print, 20 x 14 cm.

18

Johnston and Hoffman. *Maharaja Sardar Singh of Jodhpur*.
Circa 1890. Albumen print, 45.6 x 34.5 cm.

19

Raja Deen Dayal. *Three Princes with Attendants*.

Indore, Central India, circa 1894. Albumen print, 26.7 x 22 cm.

20 Anon. *A Shaiva Yogi Seated on a Tiger Skin*. Circa 1890s. Albumen print, 21 x 16 cm.

21 Anon. *A Holy Man Wearing Flower Garlands*. Circa 1890s. Albumen print, 21.2 x 14.1 cm.

22

Raja Deen Dayal. *HH The Maharao Raja of Bundi*.
1903. Carbon print, 25 x 19.5 cm.

23 Ramchandra Rao and Pratap Rao. *Maharaja Tukoji Rao Holkar III's Wedding Procession*. Indore, 1913. Gelatin silver print, 21.5 x 28.2 cm.

24

Ramchandra Rao and Pratap Rao. *Maharaja Tukoji Rao Holkar III*.
Indore, Central India, circa 1915. Gelatin silver print, 28.5 x 17 cm.

25

Devare's Art Studio, Fort, Bombay. *A Group of Royal Women Including Chandrawati Holkar of Indore, her Daughter Manorama Raje and Indira Devi of Cooch Behar*.

Circa 1922. Gelatin silver print, 28 x 23 cm.

26

Man Ray. *Maharaja Yeshwantrao Holkar II*.

Signed by Man Ray and stamped on the verso: 'Man Ray/31[bis] Rue/Campagne/Première/PARIS/Littre 76-57', circa 1930. Gelatin silver print, 23.2 x 17.5 cm.

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