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## Exhibition of First Photos of 19th-Century India and Burma by Linnaeus Tripe Premieres at National Gallery of Art, Washington



Linnaeus Tripe, *Madura: The Vygay River, with Causeway, across to Madura*, January – February 1858  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, The Carolyn Brody Fund and Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation through Robert and Joyce Menschel

Washington, DC—Innovative British photographer Captain Linnaeus Tripe (1822–1902) captured some of the earliest photographs of India and Burma (now Myanmar). In the first major traveling exhibition of his work, ***Captain Linnaeus Tripe: Photographer of India and Burma, 1852–1860***—on view at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, from September 21, 2014, through January 4, 2015—approximately 60 photographs taken between 1854 and 1860 document the dramatic landscapes and the architecture of celebrated religious and secular sites in India and Burma, several of which are now destroyed.

"Tripe occupies a special place in the history of 19th-century photography for his foresight in recognizing that photography could be an effective tool for conveying information about unknown cultures and regions," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are delighted to premiere this exhibition for visitors interested in photography, architecture, and history, and we hope that these captivating images provide inspiration to all."

### Exhibition Support

The exhibition is made possible by The Exhibition Circle of the National Gallery of Art. It is also supported by the Trellis Fund. Additional funding is kindly provided by Edward Lenkin and Roselin Atzwanger.

The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in association with the Victoria and Albert Museum. After Washington, the exhibition will be on view at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, from February 24 through May 25, 2015, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, from June 24 through October 11, 2015.

### Exhibition Highlights

Arranged chronologically, the exhibition traces Tripe's work from his earliest photographs made in England (1852–1854) during an extended leave from his first deployment in India, to those created on expeditions to the south Indian kingdom of Mysore (1854), to Burma (1855), and again to south India (1857–1858). His primary subjects range from archaeological sites and monuments, ancient and contemporary religious and secular buildings, to geological formations and landscape vistas.

Tripe first took photographs of English dockyards, ships undergoing repairs, and breakwaters—subjects of importance to the military. Photographs such as *Quarterdeck of HMS "Impregnable"* (1852–1854) distinguish his work from fellow amateurs, who preferred picturesque landscapes and genre scenes.

Tripe returned to India to work for the East India Company during a transitional time in the history of Great Britain, India, and Burma. By 1854 the company was the world's largest and most powerful commercial enterprise as well as the virtual ruler of India and Burma. Administration of this vast

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area generated a need for collecting data, maps, surveys, drawings, and eventually photographs. Inspired by his employer's interests, Tripe made a privately funded expedition to Mysore in south India, where he used his newly mastered photographic skills to document ancient sites and produced such images as *Hullabede: Suli Munduppum from the Northeast* (1854).

"Tripe's training as a surveyor, where the choice of viewpoint and careful attention to visual details were essential, was key to the artistic success of his photographs," said Sarah Greenough, senior curator and head, department of photographs, National Gallery of Art.

In 1855, Tripe and a topographic watercolor artist traveled along with a mission to Burma that sought to secure a peace treaty. During the expedition to Upper Burma, Tripe made more than 200 negatives, which he selected, retouched, printed, and compiled into portfolios, each with 120 original photographs, including *Ye-nan-gyoung: Tamarind Tree* (1855) and *Pugahm Myo: Distant View of Gauda-palen Pagoda* (1855).

The mission's ultimate destination was the royal Burmese city of Amerapoora, where Tripe made nearly 100 negatives. For the presentation portfolio of this expedition, he arranged his photographs as if giving a tour of the city: from the residency compound, past a monumental Gautama—the most popular Burmese representation of the historical Buddha—to the western suburbs. Twenty-six original photographs from his Burma expedition will be on view.

Tripe was appointed photographer to the Madras Presidency in 1856, a British administrative subdivision covering much of southern India. He considered this a great honor and proposed that his work should be the "first attempt at illustrating in a complete and systematic manner the state of a country by means of photography."

This project secured his status as the first to photograph extensively in south India—documenting the country's holiest temples to the Hindu gods Shiva and Vishnu as well as efforts at modernization by the British and the widespread influence of the East India Company. His work in south India generated more than 290 large-format negatives, which he made into nine portfolios, a total of 17,745 prints, 30 of which will be on display.

The exhibition will also showcase Tripe's 19-foot-long panorama, *Tanjore: Great Pagoda, Inscriptions around Bimanum* (1858)—the first of its kind in photography—recording the ancient Tamil inscriptions that run around the base of the Brihadishvara Temple at Tanjore in south India. To accomplish this technical marvel, Tripe circled the temple taking 21 separate exposures, which he joined and retouched to create the final composition.

To help visitors appreciate Tripe's technical achievements, the installation features a final gallery with photographs by a number of Tripe's contemporaries, explaining the photographic printing and retouching practices that distinguish his work.

### **Captain Linnaeus Tripe (1822–1902)**

From an upper-middle-class family in Devonport, England, Tripe joined the British East India Company in 1839 and was assigned to the 12th Madras Native Infantry. After several years of deployment in India, he returned to England in 1851 and began to explore an interest in photography. In 1853 he joined the Photographic Society of London.

Reflecting his military training as an officer in the British army, Tripe had great technical success in India and Burma, even though the tropical heat and humidity affected photographic chemistry. Yet Tripe's destiny as a photographer was linked to the fate of the British Empire in India. Despite his professional achievements and technical innovations, rebellions in the late 1850s prompted a new era of oversight and regulations for the recently nationalized East India Company, and the British government took over the administration and rule of India, making it a crown colony. Tripe was forced to close his studio in 1860 because of cost-cutting measures, and he almost completely abandoned photography as a result.

### **Curators, Catalog, and Related Activities**

The exhibition curators are Sarah Greenough, senior curator and head, department of photographs, National Gallery of Art; Malcolm Daniel, curator in charge, department of photography, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and Roger Taylor, professor emeritus of photographic history, De Montfort University, Leicester.

Published by the National Gallery of Art and DeMonico Books, an imprint of Prestel Publishing, the exhibition catalog includes insightful contributions from Crispin Branfoot, senior lecturer in South Asian art and archaeology, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London; as well as Taylor and Greenough. Essays explore the evolution of his practice and the importance of the sites he recorded; maps and a chronology provide an overview of his life and travels; and a description of Tripe's printing technique sheds light on a transitional moment in the development of photo processes. The 228-page fully illustrated volume is available in hardcover for purchase in the Gallery Shops. To order, please visit <http://shop.nga.gov/>; call (800) 697-9350 or (202) 842-6002; fax (202) 789-3047; or e-mail [mailorder@nga.gov](mailto:mailorder@nga.gov).

### **GALLERY TALKS**

*Captain Linnaeus Tripe: Photographer of India and Burma, 1852–1860* (50 mins.). Eric Denker: October 14–16, 28–30 at 12:00 (meet at the West Building Rotunda)

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## LECTURE

*Introduction to the Exhibition:*

*Captain Linnaeus Tripe: Photographer of India and Burma, 1852–1860*

September 28, 2014 / 2:00 pm, West Building Lecture Hall

Sarah Greenough, senior curator and head, department of photographs, National Gallery of Art

Book signing of *Captain Linnaeus Tripe: Photographer of India and Burma, 1852–1860* follows.

## PUBLIC SYMPOSIUM

*Captain Linnaeus Tripe: Photographer of India and Burma, 1852–1860*

December 10, 2014 / 11:00 am–2:30 pm, West Building Lecture Hall

Illustrated lectures by noted scholars, including John Falconer, curator of photographs, India Office Collection, The British Library; and Holger Hoock, J. Carroll Amundson Professor of British History and editor-designate, *Journal of British Studies*, University of Pittsburgh

## General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Avenue NW, and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. For information call (202) 737-4215 or visit the Gallery's Web site at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt), Twitter at [www.twitter.com/ngadc](http://www.twitter.com/ngadc), and Instagram at <http://instagram.com/ngadc>.

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For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

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