



The Emperor's Private Mosque in the Marble Palace, Dr. John Murray

The Emperor's Private Mosque in the Marble Palace

Dr. John Murray
British, Agra Fort, India,
1857–1860
Waxed-paper negative
14 1/2 x 18 1/16 in.
98.XM.7

This large waxed-paper **negative** displays a view of the private mosque built for the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan in the 1630s. Dr. John Murray, who made this negative while working in India, altered it to improve the visual harmony and luminosity of the finished positive print. He achieved increased contrast by blocking out the sky area with pigment and bleaching the deeply shaded section under the roof to more clearly show the mosque interior.



The **waxed-paper process** was particularly useful for traveling photographers like Murray because the paper did not require immediate development. It also offered more translucency than other commonly used paper negatives methods. The process involved rubbing wax into the paper negative before it was sensitized and exposed. The wax created a smooth surface and reduced the blurring effects of paper fibers. Both the negative and the final print display great clarity of detail, as in the piercings of the surrounding wall and the outlines of distant buildings.

About the Artist

Dr. John Murray (Scottish, 1809–1898)

Although trained as a medical doctor, Dr. John Murray excelled as a photographer. The Scottish-born doctor was introduced to photography around 1849, while in the Medical Service of the Army of the East India Company. Stationed near the Taj Mahal in Agra, he evidently developed a considerable interest in the Mughal architecture of the region. Throughout the forty-year period that Murray lived and worked in India, he systematically recorded many famous buildings in and around Agra and the northern state of Uttar Pradesh.

In the mid-1800s, no reliable method of enlarging **photographs** existed. To make a sizable print, Murray worked with a large-format wooden camera capable of accepting light sensitive

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materials up to 16'x 20' inches. He worked with both **glass** and waxed-paper negatives; traveling photographers and those in remote places found the waxed-paper negatives particularly useful because the paper did not require immediate development. With this unwieldy equipment, Murray produced a body of work documenting India's architecture that remained unsurpassed in the 1800s.

Questions for Teaching

What do you notice first when looking at this photograph?

What **shapes** do you see?

What lines do you see?

Based on what you see, what could be the purpose of the building in the photograph?

What are some reasons why this type of building may have been photographed?