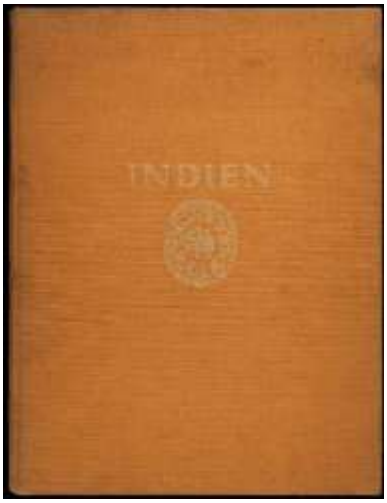
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Indien: Baukunst, Landschaft und Volksleben -1928

By Martin Hürlimann

This is the first edition of Martin Hurlimann's *Indien: Baukunst, Landschaft und Volksleben*, published by Ernst Wasmuth Verlag in 1928, with printing and plate production executed by Gebr. Fretz A.G., Zürich. The book belongs to the *Orbis Terrarum* series, a sequence of lavishly illustrated country studies issued by Ernst Wasmuth Verlag between 1922 and 1929, each volume running to between 240 and 304 full-page plates in copperplate photogravure, accompanied by introductory texts, maps, and multilingual captions such as German, English, French, and Italian.

The book measures approximately 31 x 24.5 cm and is bound in a cloth[1]. The binding of the first edition of *Indien* is executed in the publisher's cloth of a warm saffron-ochre tone. The upper board carries the title ***INDIEN*** in large Roman capitals, blind-stamped or printed. Centred beneath this, a small oval medallion reproduces what appears to be a decorative motif drawn from Indian visual culture – such as an elephant motif with a seal of the kind associated with Mughal or different regional rulers.

[1] Heinrich Hürlimann, *Indien: Baukunst, Landschaft und Volksleben* (Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, n.d.), accessed June 5, 2026, https://www.zvab.com/Indien-Baukunst-Landschaft-Volksleben-Indien-H%C3%BCrlimann/31989014939/bd

The title page identifies the publisher as Fretz & Wasmuth Verlag, Zurich, a printing and distribution partnership through which Wasmuth distributed the plates in the Swiss market. The plates are printed by the intaglio photogravure process on coated stock, tipped or bound in gatherings throughout the body of the book. The book contains 304 full-page illustrations, which is an exceptionally large number of images for a single book published during that time.

Martin Hürlimann was born in Zürich on 12 November 1897 and died there on 4 March 1984. He studied History, German literature and Philosophy at the universities of Zürich, Leipzig and Berlin, and finished his doctorate in 1924. Instead of becoming an academic, he moved into publishing, and by the mid-1920s had travelled widely across Asia — India, Ceylon, Burma and Indochina — working both as a photographer and as an editor. He carried a Sinclair Una camera with a Zeiss lens and Kodak film, a light and manageable kit that let him work fast in many different settings: inside temples, in busy bazaars, and in the harsh sunlight of South India[2]. The Indien book came directly from his travels through the Indian subcontinent in 1926 and 1927. His photos stood apart from formal studio portraits and colonial record shots. He paid close attention to framing, light and shadow, and what German speakers of the time called Stimmung - a sense of atmosphere, of real life rather than something pinned down and labelled. He wrote his captions in German, English, French and Italian, which helped the book reach readers far beyond those who spoke German.

An English-language translation — ***India: The Landscape, The Monuments and The People*** — was published by D.B. Taraporevala & Sons, Bombay, making the volume accessible to Indian readers in the colonial capital as well as to British and American audiences.

The **Orbis Terrarum series** was come up after the First World War and published between 1922 and 1929, first under the Wasmuth imprint and then by Atlantis Verlag. It was a deliberate move into the market for high-end photography books. Even through the economic ups and downs of the Weimar period, there was a steady demand for large, lavishly illustrated volumes. The series was marketed as an educational project. Its prospectus promised to replace the dry

[2] Angkor Database, "Visions of Angkor by Martin Hürlimann," accessed June 5, 2026, https://angkordatabase.asia/photos/visions-of-angkor-by-martin-hurlimann.

knowledge found in textbooks with something it called - a living, direct way of seeing the world's cultures, landscapes and monuments. Each book covered a country or region as a complete picture story. The intended reader was an educated, middle-class person who could not afford to travel widely but wanted to understand the civilisations of Asia, Africa and the Americas through trustworthy photography[3].

The title *Indien: Baukunst, Landschaft und Volksleben* — India: Architecture, Landscape and Folk Life — This book is organised around three main themes and aims to give a broad view of India. Instead of a detailed archaeological record or travel guide, he presents a visual interpretation of the site. Rather, he constructs India as a visual heritage, natural scenery and human activity are presenting in a beautiful manner during that time. The three categories overlap throughout: architectural views consistently retain human figures; landscape photographs register cultivation, settlement and spiritual geography; genre scenes are captured in natural settings.

Architecture (Baukunst)

The architectural plates constitute the largest and most systematically organised portion of this book. He documents the principal traditions of Indian monuments. North Indian *shikhara* temples; the towering *gopuram* gateways of the Dravidian south, including the Meenakshi Temple complex at Madurai; Mughal mausoleum and garden enclosures; Rajput palaces; Buddhist *stupa* complexes; Jain temples; Sikh *gurdwaras*; the Caves of Ellora; and sculptural monuments and ornamentations of temples. Here, his compositions often feature worshippers, priests or pilgrims within the frame, so that the monuments appear as living environments. This makes this book different from the archaeological survey photograph – as produced, for instance, by the Archaeological Survey of India – which typically clears the frame of figures to capture the monuments. But Hürlimann's willingness to capture the human presence reflects an aesthetic preference and a different view: one orientated towards cultural rather than

[3] Angela Müller, *Indien im Sucher: Fotografien und Bilder von Südasien in der deutschsprachigen Öffentlichkeit, 1920–1980* (Heidelberg: Heidelberg Asian Studies Publishing, 2023), 33–34, https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/48619

architectural typology. The people are invited to see India's monuments as inhabited, living and devotionally active places.

Landscape (Landschaft)

The landscape section displays the geographical range of the subcontinent: such as Malabar coast, lake in the jungle, Benares and many more. He uses a popular travel-photography style, with strong foregrounds, distant views, and rich tonal effects made possible by photogravure printing. Today, these photographs are valuable historical records of India's environment and society. Many of the landscapes depicted — the extent of forest cover, irrigation systems, the character of riverine settlement — have since been transformed beyond recognition by dam construction, agricultural intensification and urban expansion.

Folk Life (Volksleben)

It is in this section that India goes beyond being a simple study of architecture. Hürlimann photographed city streets and bazaars, village markets, artisan workshops, pilgrimage crowds, agricultural labourers and the interiors of temples and commercial spaces[4]. These images tell us what we might now call a visual ethnography, though Hürlimann himself did not use that term. The photographs were made for Western audiences and reflect common European views of Asia in the 1920s, including an interest in the picturesque, the exotic, and cultural differences. However, they are more complex and valuable .Many record details of material culture — dress, ornament, tool, vehicle, vessel — not preserved in any other medium with comparable to this.

[4] Martin Hürlimann, *India: The Landscape, the Monuments and the People* (Bombay: D. B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1932), accessed June 5, 2026, https://archive.org/details/indialandscapemo00hurl/page/8/mode/2up

The Photogravure Medium

The plates of Indien were created using the copperplate photogravure process, a method for reproducing continuous-tone photographs in luxury publications from the late 19th to early 20th centuries. This technique involves exposing a gelatin tissue beneath a positive transparency and transferring it to a copper plate, where varying densities of the gelatin represent tonal gradations.The etching process results in intaglio impressions that achieve unparalleled tonal ranges, offering a rich depth in shadows and translucent highlights which cannot be matched by other printing methods. This has significant as photogravure plates are not simply reproductions but autonomous objects shaped by skilled manual interventions such as retouching and staging, which introduce interpretative choices throughout production[5].

The Gebr. Fretz firm in Zürich, which executed the printing for Indien, was among the leading European photogravure workshops of the period. The quality of the plates bears this out: the tonal rendering of stone surfaces, the differentiation of textural incident in crowd scenes, the management of extreme tonal contrast in exterior views under strong South Indian sunlight — all attest to a high order of technical accomplishment that is, in itself, historically significant

This book is important as a colonial document but not a simple one. Hürlimann had the access and freedom that British rule provided, yet his images resist the usual logic of colonial photography. He gave the same compositional care to a grain worker as he did to the Taj Mahal.

This book also demonstrates how a photographic sequence can carry a sustained argument without words. The arrangement of the plates, the contrast between ancient monuments and living labour, and the framing of figures in architectural space all serve to present India as a civilisation of depth and richness. It touched directly on contemporary debates about Indian self-government and cultural worth.

Whether Hürlimann intended it or not, his choices in selecting and presenting photographs carried political meaning. For scholars studying how photography influenced Western views

[5] Gerry Beegan, *The Mass Image: A Social History of Photomechanical Reproduction in Victorian London* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 98–115.

of non-Western societies, *India* remains an important and complex work that cannot be judged simply or easily**.**

Explanation of Selected Illustration Plates from this book.



Plate - 9

Madura, South Tower of the Great Temple

Sculptural surface of the southern gopuram, Meenakshi Amman Temple, Madurai, Tamil Nadu. One of fourteen gateway towers of the temple complex, built during the Nayak period in the seventeenth century[6].

Hürlimann points his camera directly at the surface of the southern gopuram of the Meenakshi Temple in Madurai. Rather than stepping back to show the full tower, he moves in close, filling the frame with an unbroken wall of sculpted figures. There are over 1,500 individual sculptures stacked across multiple levels. At the bottom you can see individual deities, guardian figures and dancing forms. Higher up, the figures crowd so tightly together that the eye stops reading them one by one and starts seeing them as a single mass of carved stone. He cuts out the sky and the surrounding temple grounds entirely. He wanted the viewer to feel the sheer density and relentlessness of the sculptural programme rather than admire the tower from a comfortable distance.

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[6] George Michell, *Architecture and Art of Southern India: Vijayanagara and the Successor States, 1350–1750*, The New Cambridge History of India, vol. I, no. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 172–195.



Plate - 15

Madura. Subrahmanya Statue in the Hall of the Thousand Pillars

Interior of the Aayiram Kaal Mandapam, Meenakshi Amman Temple, Madurai, Tamil Nadu. The hall, built in 1569, contains 985 individually carved pillars and is one of the most celebrated spaces in South Indian temple architecture.

Hürlimann moves inside the Meenakshi Temple complex and into the great pillared hall known as the Aayiram Kaal Mandapam[7]. The hall contains 985 individually carved columns, and from any point inside it the pillars appear to line up in perfect rows stretching away in every direction. He places a large stone sculpture of Subrahmanya — the war god of Tamil devotion, shown riding his peacock and carrying his weapons . The pillars are not plain shafts. Each one is carved with mythological creatures, human figures and floral patterns, so the space surrounding the sculpture is itself a sculptural world. Natural light falling from openings in the roof creates strong contrasts between light and shadow across the polished dark stone of the statue. He uses this to give the figure weight and presence. The image does two things at once — it documents an important sculpture and it captures the atmosphere of the architectural space that holds it.

[7] Hall of Thousand Pillars," https://www.maduraimeenakshitemple.com/article/id/201/hall-of-thousand-pillars accessed June 6, 2026; *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Mumbai* 96, no. 3 (2023): 68–70.



Plate – 73

Bangalore. Hindu Mendicant Monk as Street Singer

A sadhu photographed in a street in Bangalore, in the princely state of Mysore. The image belongs to the Volksleben section of this book, which documents the living social world of the Indian subcontinent.

The plate shows a sadhu — a wandering Hindu ascetic — standing in a Bangalore street. The man is elderly, barefoot, wearing a minimal loincloth with a shawl loosely draped around him. Strands of large rudraksha beads circle his chest, a stringed instrument hangs from one shoulder and his other hand holds a water gourd. Behind him is a shallow street scene — a building wall, a signboard, and a child. The setting is spare and the figure fills most of the frame. Hürlimann photographs him straight on, giving the image something of the quality of a formal portrait even though it is clearly taken in the open street. The sadhu was a very common subject in colonial photography of India, and it was a subject to capture— the wandering holy man used as a symbol of India's heritage. The direct framing and careful tonal work give the man individual dignity. The caption calls him a street singer, not simply a holy man.



Plate – 75

Hyderabad-Deccan. In the Fruit Bazaar

A fruit vendor's stall in the bazaar quarter of Hyderabad, capital of the Nizam's dominions in the Deccan. Hyderabad was among the wealthiest and most commercially active cities of the Indian subcontinent in the 1920s.

This plate belongs to the *Volksleben* (folklife) section where he covered bazaar of Hyderabad in the Deccan. Hürlimann photographs a fruit seller's stall, organising the image around a pair of circular wicker baskets hanging from above, loaded with fruit, and a balance scale sitting below them. To the right, a vendor in a white kurta and dark cap looks directly at the camera with a calm, steady expression — not performing, not retreating, simply present. A second figure is visible further back in the shadowed interior of the stall. The hanging baskets and the scale divide the frame neatly and give the composition a quiet visual logic. The man is going about his working day and Hürlimann photographs him on those terms. This is one of the clearest examples in the book of Hürlimann treating everyday commercial life with the same seriousness he brings to temple architecture.



Plate – 257

Ahmedabad. Jain Nuns in the New Jaina Temple

Interior of a Jain temple in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, one of the most important centres of Jain religious and communal life in India. The plate documents Svetambara Jain female monastic practice as it was conducted in an urban temple in the 1920s.

Seven Jain nuns sit in a quiet arc inside a temple in Ahmedabad. They wear identical white robes with white cloth drawn around their faces, and several hold the soft fibre brooms that are among the required possessions of nuns in the Svetambara Jain tradition[8]. Behind them rises an ornately carved stone archway leading into the inner shrine — every surface covered in the dense foliate carving typical of Gujarati Jain temple architecture. Hürlimann places the women in the foreground and lets the carved screen frame them from behind, so that the viewer sees both the nuns and the architectural world they inhabit at the same time. The women are not posing exactly, but they are not unaware of the camera either. Their postures are composed and settled. This plate is a rare and careful document of female Jain monastic life as it was lived in a prosperous urban temple in the 1920s. The balance Hürlimann strikes between the human figures and the architectural richness surrounding them is one of the most successful in the volume — neither element overwhelms the other.

[8] Richard H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1999), 140–148.



Plate 263

Hyderabad-Sind. Jeweller in his Shop

Interior of a jeweller's workshop and retail space in Hyderabad-Sind, present-day Sindh province of Pakistan. The city was a significant commercial centre in the Indus valley, with a long-established tradition of goldsmiths serving local Hindu and Muslim merchant communities.

Hürlimann photographs a jeweller seated cross-legged on his work platform in his shop in Hyderabad-Sind. The man is middle-aged and stoutly built, dressed in white turban, kurta and dhoti. He holds a small piece of jewellery out towards the viewer as if offering it for inspection. Behind him a large wooden cabinet fills the background, its shelves crowded with vessels, bead strands and the accumulated stock of an established business. To his left sits a brass balance scale — the essential tool of the goldsmith's trade. The composition is straightforward and deliberate. The jeweller sits at the centre, the cabinet frames one side, the scale anchors the other, and the viewer is positioned exactly where a customer would stand. The man is seen on his own terms, in his own professional setting. It is also a precise material culture record of a type of workshop-retail operation that was widespread across the subcontinent in this period but rarely photographed with this level of care and attention.



Plate 285

Jammu. Modern Hindu Temple

A cluster of Nagara-style Hindu temple towers in Jammu, winter capital of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir under the Dogra Maharajas. The complex reflects the sustained temple-building programme of the Dogra dynasty throughout the nineteenth century.

This plate depicts an architectural setting featuring a cluster of Hindu temple towers in Jammu, the winter capital of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. The image shows several shikhara spires — the tall, curving towers of North Indian Nagara-style temple architecture — grouped together above a broad arcaded enclosure at ground level. The surfaces look relatively fresh and the brickwork clean, suggesting these temples were built in the nineteenth century rather than in antiquity. Trees to the left of the frame soften the composition and place the temples in a living landscape rather than isolating them as historical monuments. Hürlimann photographs from across an open space, giving a clear view of the whole complex.

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