

William Hodges

Travels in India, During the Years 1780, 1781, 1782, & 1783

London: Printed for the Author and sold by J. Edwards, 1793

First Edition

William Hodges's *Travels in India* occupies an important place in the visual and intellectual history of eighteenth-century India. Hodges was the first professional British landscape painter to work extensively in the subcontinent, travelling there under the patronage of Warren Hastings and spending several years recording its landscapes, architecture, cities and monuments. The 1793 *Travels* distilled those experiences into a compact illustrated narrative that combined observation, travel writing and aesthetic judgment.

Hodges had travelled in India during the years 1780 to 1783, moving through Bengal and north India and encountering places that would become central to the British visual imagination of the subcontinent: Calcutta, Benares, Patna, Chunar, Lucknow, Agra, Gwalior and numerous sites along the Ganges. His attention repeatedly turns to architecture, ruins, river landscapes, cities and the relationship between built form and landscape. What distinguishes Hodges from many later travellers is the fact that he approached India first and foremost as an artist. He saw composition, scale, atmosphere and architecture with a painter's eye, while also recording social and political impressions of the places through which he travelled.

The book appeared at an especially significant moment. British territorial power in India was expanding rapidly, but a standardized European visual vocabulary for representing India had not yet fully formed. Hodges's paintings and prints helped create that vocabulary. His work preceded the celebrated aquatints of Thomas and William Daniell and helped establish the picturesque representation of India that would dominate British visual culture for decades. In this sense, *Travels in India* is more than a travel account: it is an important document in the formation of the European image of India.

The first edition was published in London in 1793 by Hodges himself and sold by J. Edwards. Bibliographical records describe the work as a quarto of vi, 156 pages, accompanied by fifteen leaves of plates, one of them folding. The engravings were executed after Hodges's own drawings by a distinguished group of engravers, including William Byrne, Thomas Medland, James Fittler and others.

The illustrations are particularly important. Hodges had already established his reputation through his Indian views, and the plates in *Travels* translated the immediacy of his sketchbooks into the printed book. Contemporary and modern catalogues have consequently treated the work as one of the key illustrated records produced by the earliest generation of professional British artists in India.

The present copy

The present copy is especially attractive for its provenance.

It comes from the historic library associated with **Hazlewood Castle in Yorkshire**, the ancient seat of the **Vavasour family**. Hazlewood had been connected with the Vavasours since the Norman period; the castle's own history records that the estate remained associated with the family for centuries, while Historic England notes the medieval origins of the house and the licence to crenellate granted to William Vavasour in 1286. The volume later appeared at Bonhams before entering the present Eye of the Beholder collection.

The Vavasours were one of Yorkshire's old Catholic landed families, and Hazlewood Castle remained closely associated with them into the nineteenth century. Their long tenure gives the provenance particular resonance: this is not merely a former institutional copy, but a book that passed through the library of an old English country-house family whose own history extended across the same centuries in which Britain's relationship with India was taking shape.

Provenance:

From the library of the Vavasour family at Hazlewood Castle, Yorkshire; later sold at Bonhams; subsequently acquired for the present collection.