

Indoislamica

'Peccavi' ('I have sinned')

In 1843 Sir Charles Napier annexed the Indian province of Sindh and was criticised in parliament in 1844 for his ruthless campaign. Catherine Winkworth, a girl in her teens, remarked to her teacher that Napier's despatch to the Governor-General of India, after capturing Sindh, should have been 'Peccavi' (Latin for 'I have sinned'). She sent her joke to the new humorous magazine *Punch*, which printed it as a factual report under Foreign Affairs. As a result the pun has usually been credited to Napier.

Lieutenant William Edwards of the 86th Regiment and his 'Sketches in Scinde': an essay by Rosemary Raza

Lieutenant Edwards' *Sketches in Scinde*, which were published in an album in 1846, are the only series of folio size plates by a British military artist devoted exclusively to Sindh. They were produced at a critical point in the history of Sindh, after its invasion and annexation in 1843. The artist was at the centre of events as a young officer of the 86th or Royal County Down Regiment, having been appointed aide-de-camp to General Sir Charles Napier, the conqueror and subsequent administrator of Sindh. Edwards' remarkable work was one of the high points in the visual recording of Sindh, and falls within the context of a history of illustration by young military officers begun in the early decades of the 19th century.



'Rorree on the Indus – Upper Scinde' (plate 8)

'The presence of young officers in Sindh was due to the increasing strategic importance of the area to the British, who feared the expansionist plans of both the French and the Russians'

The presence of young officers in Sindh was due to the increasing strategic importance of the area to the British, who feared the expansionist plans of both the French and the Russians. Missions were sent to the court of the ruling family of Sindh, the Talpurs, at Hyderabad in 1808 and 1809, to try to establish British influence; they were also despatched to explore unknown parts of the area, among them Lieutenant Henry Pottinger and Captain Charles Christie, who set out in 1810 to travel through Balochistan. An expanding print industry and readership at home eager, for information about British achievements, created opportunities for the publication of accounts of exploration, which Pottinger seized in 1816 with his *Travels in Beloochistan and Sinde* - this also gave details of the mission to Sindh in 1809. [Indoislamica has a fine copy of this work.](#)

'Illustration had become an important part of travel literature'

Illustration had become an important part of travel literature, and military officers, whose professional training included drawing and painting, were well placed to provide the necessary sketches. The frontispiece to Pottinger's work was by Lieutenant Robert Grindlay, who had been a member of the 1808 mission to Hyderabad. His work was also used to illustrate the narrative of another young military officer, Alexander Burnes, whose *Travels into Bokhara* (1834) also included an account of his voyage up the Indus to Lahore. Alexander Burnes' older brother James, a doctor, had earlier visited the Talpur court in Hyderabad in a private capacity to treat a member of the ruling family, and the 1839 reprint of his *Narrative of a visit to the court of Sinde* also contained illustrations by his friends, Captains W.C. Harris and E.P. Del Hoste, who had both been involved in reconnoitring the country.

This was the context in which Britain's presence in Sindh and the adjacent areas was to expand considerably, along with illustration by those participating in events. By the late 1830s, fear of Russian encroachment on British India via Afghanistan had reached such hysterical proportions that Britain attempted to impose a friendly ruler on Afghanistan. This attempt was backed by substantial British forces who approached from Bengal and Bombay via southern Sindh, uniting in a march on Kabul in 1839. The two year campaign was a disaster, resulting in one of the most humiliating defeats of the British army.

However, public interest ensured that there was a ready market for illustrations of the campaign and the areas through which the troops had marched. While the officers who had drawn and painted Sindh from the 1810s to the mid 1830s had been members of the East India Company's Bombay Army, substantial numbers of the regiments participating in the Afghan campaign were drawn from the British Army. Their officers were for the first time presented with the spectacular scenery, impressive architecture and picturesquely clad peoples of the area, and those with an artistic eye responded enthusiastically.

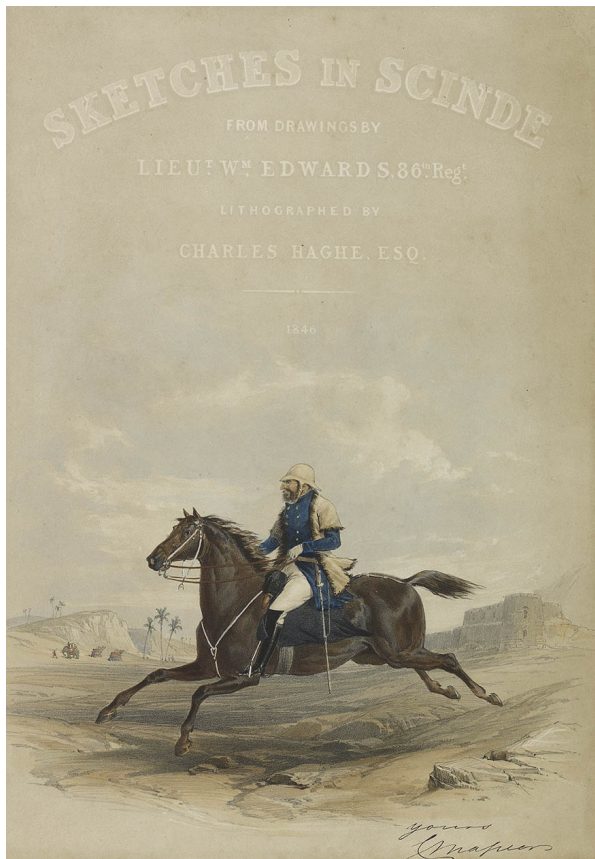
A number of plate books were published which, while focusing on Afghanistan, also included scenes in Sindh which the artist officers had encountered. Among them were *Views in Affghaunistan* (1841) by Sir Keith Jackson, a captain in the 4th Regiment of Light Dragoons, James Atkinson's *Sketches in Affghaunistan* (1842), and *Characteristics and Costumes in Affghaunistan* (1843) by Captain Lockyer Willis Hart.

'The failure in Afghanistan set the scene for Britain's subsequent military engagement in Sindh'

The failure in Afghanistan set the scene for Britain's subsequent military engagement in Sindh. The country now became even more important as a bulwark against Russian expansionism. Furthermore, an even higher premium was placed on success to redeem the abysmal record of the British army. Troops moved into Sindh in substantial numbers, and, after the defeat of the Talpur rulers at Miani and Dubba in early 1843, remained in garrisons throughout the country. Many officers came to know Sindh in a more intimate way, and the tradition of illustrated reportage continued in greater depth, exemplified particularly successfully in Captain Thomas Postans' *Personal observations on Sind* (1843). Lieutenant William Edwards was, however, the only officer to emulate the military artists of the Afghan campaign producing folios of views of Sindh.

Lieutenant William Edwards was, however, the only officer to emulate the military artists of the Afghan campaign producing folios of views of Sindh.

One of the principal aims of the folio was to celebrate British achievement, all the sweeter after previous defeat. Edwards was on the staff of General Sir Charles Napier during his campaign to stabilize the areas to the north of Sindh, and was present during the successful engagements at Truckee in March 1845. Two plans showing the disposition of the troops introduce the album, clearly establishing its context within the assertion of British supremacy.



Title page showing Major General Sir Charles Napier on his charger

Although Napier's conduct of the campaign in Sindh created considerable controversy at home, there is no doubt that to Edwards, as indeed to many, he was a hero. Edwards dedicated the folio to him, and on the title page depicted Napier galloping on his horse across the sandy plains of Sindh. The portrait is affectionate, depicting both the zest for action and eccentricity which characterized the General and endeared him to his troops. It is anchored in Sindh not only by the background, but the General's clothes, especially the furlined jacket which was much worn locally to protect against the desert night cold. Napier approved this representation with his signature, and it was frequently reproduced in the course of following decades.

Of the ten plates in the album, two illustrate the bleak terrain in which the British troops fought successfully at Truckee. Another five illustrate Hyderabad, successfully captured by the British two years earlier in 1843. The presence of red-uniformed British troops in two plates demonstrated who was now in control.



'Main Guard and Government House, Fort Hyderabad' (plate 5)

Despite this, however, the tone of the accompanying letterpress is not triumphalist. Edwards gives a sympathetic picture of one of the former amirs (rulers), Mir Nasir Khan, noting ironically that it was his ease in the company of the British that was in part responsible for the ruling family's downfall. The artist admired the impressive appearance of parts of the fort of Hyderabad, and, to establish a rapport with the viewer, noted that the round tower, which formerly housed the wealth of the Talpurs, was likened by the British to the round tower at Windsor.



'The Round Tower, Fort Hyderabad' (plate 3)

Edwards also noted the beauty of the frescoed walls and ceilings in the amirs' apartments, and several of his plates illustrate the painted decoration on exterior walls.

He was also alive to the beauty and interest of Sindh's scenery and architecture in other parts of the country. One of his plates depicts Sehwan, revered for the shrine of the 13th century saint Lal Shahbaz Qalandar; another, intricately decorated tombs at Truck in the rugged hills between Karachi and Sehwan. In these, no Europeans are depicted to interrupt the spectator's engagement with Sindh. Indeed, Edwards' comment that Truck was away off the beaten track encourages a sense of privileged participation.



'Entrance to the Town of Shewan, on the Side of Lal Shah Baz's Tomb' (plate 7)

'These magnificent plates were available as lithographs, either tinted in neutral shades, or in a de-luxe hand-painted edition in colour'

These magnificent plates were available as lithographs, either tinted in neutral shades, or in a de-luxe hand-painted edition in colour, a version which does much greater justice to the scenes Edwards depicts. Earlier views of India, such as those by the Daniells, had often been published as aquatints. This technology, however, gave way to lithography, which from the 1830s came to dominate topographical illustration. Although a small number of particularly talented artists drew their original work on lithographic stones, the majority relied on professional artists to undertake this stage of their reproduction, which gave amateur sketching and painting a much more sophisticated appearance.

None of William Edwards' original sketches is known to have survived, so it cannot be determined to what extent he benefited from reproduction by a professional hand, but in Charles Haghe he found an assured lithographer. Belgian in origin, Charles Haghe was the younger brother of Louis Haghe, one of the most distinguished lithographers of the time, who had come to London and established with William Day the firm of Day & Haghe, which was appointed lithographer first to William IV, and then Queen Victoria.

The lithography for *Sketches in Scinde* was carried out at the family firm, and the album published by Henry Graves & Co., who again had a royal connection, as official printsellers and publishers to the Queen.

Apart from his own album of folio views, William Edwards also provided illustrations for the *History of General Sir Charles Napier's Administration of Scinde, and Campaign in the Cutchee Hills* (1851), which was written by Napier's brother, Lieutenant-General Sir William Napier. The controversy surrounding Napier's conquest of Sindh was hotly and bitterly contested on both sides. Napier's warmest defender was his brother William, who wrote a number of books justifying the campaign in Sindh and subsequently on its borders. It was natural that Lieutenant-General Sir William Napier should turn to Edwards for illustrations for his *History* since the younger officer had been present in the areas described, and had already proved himself such a staunch admirer of Charles Napier. Edwards provided a number of views of the dramatic and forbidding scenery where Napier's campaigns to the north of Sindh were fought.

However, they were not to the taste of Sir William who criticised them roundly in print: 'A love of art led (Edwards) to aim too much at agreeable pictures; and the austerity of the region has not been adequately rendered'. Edwards had certainly shown in his *Sketches in Scinde* that he was a lover of the romantic and picturesque, as his plate of 'Roree on the Indus' (see plate 8) had shown. Unfortunately this did not suit Sir William Napier's purpose which was to underline his brother's achievement by emphasising the difficulty of the conditions confronting him.

By the time the *History* was published, Edwards had left the army, which possibly gave Sir William Napier greater freedom to criticise his work. He had been promoted to Captain in 1847, and subsequently transferred to the 17th Regiment of Foot. Soon after in 1849 he sold his commission and moved to civilian life. His later career remains obscure, and if he continued to sketch and paint, there is no record.

'Edwards' artistic achievement'

Edwards' artistic achievement lay in the past, but it was undoubtedly remarkable. His folio of lithographs was a high point in the illustration of Sindh. It was also to prove a final one. In the second half of the 19th century, Sindh ceased to be front page news, and the incentive for the reproduction of large scale prints dwindled. However, the interest he had shown in the architecture and scenery of Sindh continued to develop, and came to be reflected over the years in new technology such as photography. Though outstanding achievements were to come, *Sketches in Scinde* remains among the greatest.

**Indoislamica is fortunate enough to have a number of plates
from this scarce work:**

Title page showing General Sir Charles Napier riding through Sindh

The Round Tower, Fort Hyderabad

North West Face, Fort Hyderabad

Rorree on the Indus

Main Guard & Government House, Fort Hyderabad

Tombs at Truck

From the Top of the Round Tower (Fort Hyderabad)

Southern Entrance to Bejar Khan's Stronghold, at Truckee

Rosemary Raza is the author of *In their own words: British writers on India 1740-1857* (Oxford University Press, Delhi 2006). As R.A. Raza, she also selected, edited and introduced an anthology of Marianne Postans' writing, *Travels, tales and encounters in Sindh and Balochistan 1840-43* (Oxford University Press, Karachi 2002). 'The role of early British women writers in shaping perspectives of India' appeared in *South Asian Review*, (2009, Vol. 30, No 2, 187-210.)

In the field of art, she contributed 'Picturing Sindh: British representations' to *Sindh: Past glory, present nostalgia* (Marg Publications, Bombay 2008, Vol. 60. No.1, 120-133). This will be published in greatly expanded book form.