

**FROM ROMANTICISM TO EMPIRE:
CHANGING BRITISH PERCEPTIONS OF INDIAN ARCHITECTURE
THROUGHOUT THE LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

HISTORY

by

**JENNIFER L. B. WOOD
APRIL 2012**

at

**THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON AND THE
CITADEL**

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ABSTRACT

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Following the Sepoy Rebellion (1857), India's architecture came to play a key role in Britons' quest for knowledge and comprehension of India and Indians. For this reason, British perceptions of the subcontinent's architecture are intimately and foundationally linked to Britons' understanding of India. However, few scholars have addressed these architectural perceptions in their own right, which is the purpose of this thesis. An evaluation of scholarly papers, journal and newspaper articles, travel narratives, visual artistic works, history books, museum exhibit and exhibition accounts from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth reveals that Britons' first introduction to Indian architecture came through the lens of Romanticism. Intellectual and artistic Romantic open mindedness created an environment in which Britons could appreciate and admire the unusual architectural traditions of the subcontinent. However, as the nineteenth century progressed, Romantic inquiry and depictions gave way to scientific methods of investigation and presentation while Britain increasingly committed herself to an imperial role in India. These occurrences worked together to dismantle the Romantic lens of the first introduction and reframe perceptions in the shadow of empire and its inherent Western supremacy. Through the lens of empire and Western supremacy, respect and admiration for Islamic traditions declined in British eyes while Hindu traditions only met with disapproval and disdain when given attention at all. Only the ancient Buddhist monuments of India with their Western aesthetic influences, respected religious association, and lack of native, living followers could Britons look on with high regard.