



“Seeing Lhasa” exhibition

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In September 2003, the exhibition “Seeing Lhasa: British Depictions of the Tibetan Capital 1936–1947” will open at the Pitt Rivers Museum. The exhibition is designed to explore the visual representation of Lhasa and its inhabitants through the media of photography, film and painting. It demonstrates how a group of elite men based in a far-flung outpost of the British Empire established a vision of Tibet for consumption by others back at home. Capitalizing on the excellent photographic collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum the exhibition will show how a series of visual tropes emerges from the sight/site of Lhasa with views of the Potala Palace, the portrait of its chief inhabitant (the Dalai Lama) and the dramatic landscape in which the city is set becoming the most potent. The exhibition also seeks to move beyond the idea of the photograph as simply an official document of colonial record and to analyze the social conditions in which images are produced in the light of Anglo-Tibetan relations – both personal and political.

My presentation will serve as an introduction to the exhibition at the Pitt Rivers and suggest some new approaches to British photographs of Tibet emphasizing the importance of visual sources for historical and contemporary projects.