

# FROM DAGUERRETYPE TO DIGITAL: ANTHROPOLOGY AND PHOTOGRAPHY



Anthropology and photography have a long history together, dating back nearly to their origins in the mid-nineteenth century. Photography was embraced by anthropologists and others seeking new ways to portray human physiognomy, culture, and experience. Technical innovations allowed anthropologists to expand their examination of human existence around the world, from early daguerreotypes to today's digital photographs and video.

This exhibition highlights some of the greatest inventions in photographic history while exploring the implications for anthropology. Each photograph or set of photographs in the exhibition tells a number of stories—about the people or actions depicted, about the photographers and how they came to shoot the images, about the photographs as objects, and about the technologies used to produce the photographs.



Pwan Ye-Koo, side view. Lorenzo G. Chase, 1850. Daguerreotype. PM 35-5-10/53055

## DAGUERREOTYPES: THE FIRST PHOTOGRAPHS

The subject of this portrait by Boston-based daguerreotypist Lorenzo Chase was seventeen-year-old Miss Pwan Ye-Koo, “a young Lady, with feet 2 and a half inches long.” She was part of “The Chinese Family,” a touring performance troupe engaged for eight weeks by well-known circus showman P.T. Barnum in 1850. This portrait was found among other daguerreotypes collected by the famed nineteenth-century scientist Louis Agassiz. Chase was careful to shoot frontal and profile angles; some early anthropologists believed such views could help them identify distinguishing ethnic characteristics.

The invention of the daguerreotype in 1839 is often cited as the birth of photography. A unique, positive image—no negative was created—the fragile daguerreotype was usually sealed under glass, and sandwiched between a brass window mat and the frame.

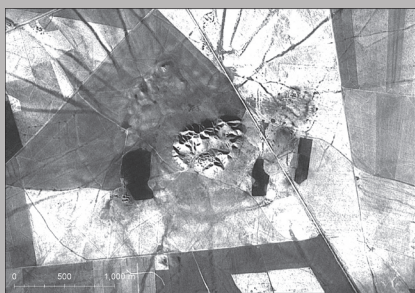
## LANTERN SLIDES: INNER MONGOLIA IN COLOR

Not all photographs later relevant to anthropology were taken by anthropologists. In the nineteenth century explorers, colonial officers, and reporters also photographed indigenous peoples around the world. Between 1921 and 1925, the National Geographic Society sponsored several expeditions by the young American couple Janet and Frederick Wulsin to Tibet, China, and Mongolia. Their assignment: to document people and places and to collect zoological and botanical specimens.

The Wulsins used transparent, flexible roll film, introduced by Kodak in 1889. They used large format cameras and developed their film in makeshift darkrooms whenever they had sufficient water. The Wulsins created over 1,900 black-and-white photographs and submitted eighty to Beijing photographic studios to create hand-colored glass slides. Introduced in 1849, the lantern slide medium was a popular teaching aid and parlor entertainment. The Wulsin slides were the first known color images of some of the most renowned religious and cultural centers in this part of the world.



Camels in Oasis. Janet and Frederick Wulsin, 1923. Graflex or Kodak 4x5 camera image printed onto glass. PM 56-55-60/15706.1



Tell Brak, CORONA satellite photograph, 1967. Courtesy U.S. Geological Survey

## SATELLITE PHOTOGRAPHY: MESOPOTAMIA FROM THE SKY

During the Cold War, the U.S. established satellite programs to identify military facilities in the Soviet Union and the Middle East. The photographs have been declassified and are now sometimes used for environmental, historical, and archaeological research. CORONA images were captured on film, and stored in the satellite nose cone, which was dropped by parachute and retrieved in midair by a U.S. Air Force plane.

This 1967 CORONA image reveals a network of over 3,744 miles of tracks worn down by the continuous human and animal traffic between the central settlement of Tell Brak in Syria, and the surrounding fields and pastures. In recent decades, many of the tracks have been destroyed by farming, and they survive only as dark bands in CORONA photographs.

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