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Abstract:

In this lecture, I explore the role of photography as a formative medium in the history of archaeology, focusing on the case of early scientific expeditions across Mongolia.

Rather than treating photography as a neutral tool of documentation, I approach it as a visual practice that actively shaped how archaeological materiality, mobility, and landscapes were perceived, recorded, and communicated both within the discipline and to wider audiences. Building on my previous research into long-term mobility networks and landscape archaeology in the Gobi-Altai region, I analyse early photographic material from the archives of the Kunstkamera in Saint Petersburg and the American Museum of Natural History in New York, focusing on expeditions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries along the Northern Route, a lesser-known corridor of the Silk Roads crossing the Gobi Desert and the Valley of Lakes.

In particular, I consider the work of Yvette Borup Andrews, one of the earliest women field photographers in Asia, whose distinctive visual approach offers alternative ways of seeing and engaging with Mongolian landscapes and communities, while challenging traditional narratives and the gendered dynamics of archaeological media.

By reading historical photographs as archaeological artefacts in their own right, this talk considers how photography not only reflected but also co-produced archaeology's material and ideological foundations: a visual legacy that continues to shape the discipline's imagination today.

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