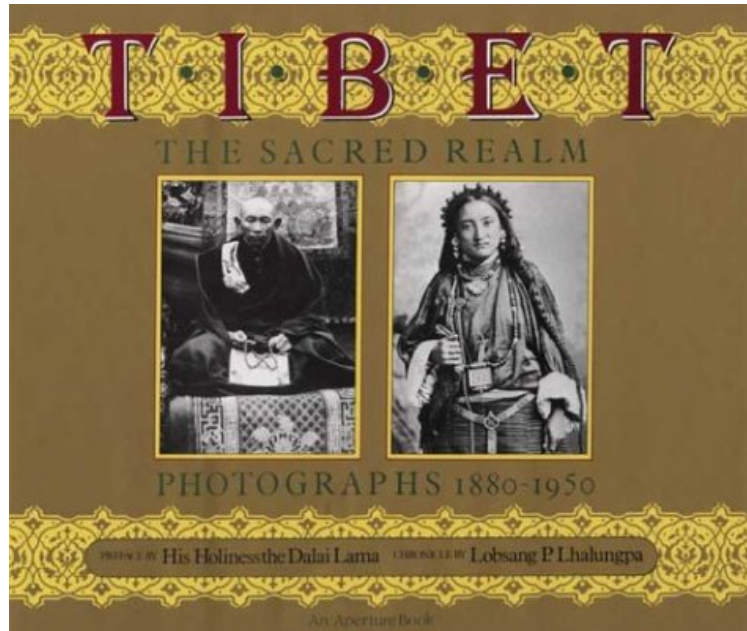


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Tibet: The Sacred Realm, Photographs 1880-1950

Lobsang P. Lhalungpa

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Ever since the first European travelers reached Tibet six centuries ago, Westerners have been fascinated and tantalized by tales of that legendary, remote mountain civilization. Today, Tibet's peaceful, integrated way of life; deeply felt Buddhist tradition; and its culture rich in art, architecture, dance and music have all but disappeared, gradually replaced by the trappings of life introduced since the Chinese take-over of the 1950's. Most of the 3,000 monasteries and temples that once dotted the Tibetan countryside have been destroyed or converted into museums. Only in a few scattered migr communities, in the treasures hastily smuggled out by 100,000 refugees who fled Tibet in 1959, and in a handful of photographs, is the old Tibet remembered and preserved. Tibet: The Sacred Realm brings together for the first time a selection of more than 140 of these rare photographs, taken from 1880 to 1950 by more than twenty intrepid adventurers, naturalists, explorers, scientists, and missionaries, who were among the very few in the West to travel in Tibet. In this valuable visual record the forward-looking thirteenth Dalai Lama sits in exile in India surrounded by his high officials; one of Tibet's wealthiest families poses in their Western-style dining room; the artificial lake of Lhasa reflects the imposing gilded roofs of the Potala Palace; Buddhist monks perform sacred dances in ornate animal masks; pilgrims circumambulate the holy city; and monks and sheepskin-bundled nomads gather on the vast northern plains to listen for the first time to a visitor's gramophone. Selected from the collections of twenty-

three institutions' archives and private source in Europe and the United States, the photographs represent the finest work of the explorer-photographers Alexandra David-Nel, Brooke Dolan, George Taylor, Ilya Tolstoy, and Claude White, among others, including the Tibetan photographer Sonam Wangfel Laden-La. Facing inclement weather, the threats of bandits, the objections of the lamas, and countless other hardships, these photographers still managed to distill the essence of Tibet's mystery and fascination. Recalling his early years in Tibet, Buddhist scholar, translator, and son of the former chief state oracle of Tibet, Lobsang P. Lhalungpa adds another dimension to the story revealed in the photographs. He shares his recollections of a boyhood in Lhasa, his training under the most revered Tibetan lamas, his life as a monk official in the Dalai Lama's government, and his sorrowful departure from his native land: "I mounted my favorite gelding, which had been saddled with its finest saddle cover. As I bent down to tuck the folds of my clothes under one leg, my round, fur-and-brocade-trimmed hat slipped off my head and fell to the ground. I remember feeling instant apprehension. Was this a sign that I would never see Lhasa again?" As the technological age threatens to swallow, one by one, the unique civilizations of the world, the lessons to be learned from the age-old traditions of Tibet become all the more valuable. Tibet's past, illuminated here by glimpses of special vision, offers profound spiritual insight and a majestic feast for the eye. The photographs are introduced by a preface by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

"Whatever the fate of Tibet, the spiritual essence of the Sacred Realm remains in the hearts of the Tibetan people. Our cultural heritage lives, too, in the handful of photographs taken in our country before 1950, all the more precious because they preserve a sense of time and place that now exists only in our memories."--Lobsang P. Lhalungpa