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The role of repeat photography in establishing theories of transition in high mountain environments

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Today, photos play an important role in geoscience and public discussion. When photographic techniques developed during the second half of the 19th century, it took several decades until high mountain areas and specific features could be captured with this technique, as a follow up to traditional paintings and drawings. In European geography, Friedrich Simony developed the idea of tackling geomorphological processes by time lapse photography. Contemporary literature shows that his technique of combining photography with empirical data and theories was convincing, and that he established a new style of scientific discussion. Still, the comparison of historical with contemporary photography offers scientific insights and information which is not covered by any other type of empirical evidence as measurements, maps or descriptions. For example not only extent, but also firm and debris cover of glaciers, information on type and extent of vegetation, the width and style of roads, details of infrastructure and cultural practices can be tackled from early photographs. Several archives do allow not only access to photographic documents, but also to metadata. Interdisciplinary effort has to be taken to further analyse this wealth of information.