This fascinating study of two British missions to Tibet in 1774 and 1904 provides a unique perspective on the relationship between the Enlightenment and European colonialism. Gordon Stewart compares and contrasts the Enlightenment-era mission led by George Bogle and the Edwardian mission of Francis Younghusband as they crossed the Himalayas into Tibet. Through the British agents’ diaries, reports, and letters and by exploring their relationships with Indians, Bhutanese, and Tibetans, Stewart is able to trace the shifting ideologies, economic interests, and political agendas that lay behind British empire-building from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century. This compelling account sheds new light on the changing nature of British imperialism, on power and intimacy in the encounter between East and West, and on the relationship of history and memory.

GORDON T. STEWART is the Jack and Margaret Sweet Professor of History at Michigan State University. His previous publications include The Great Awakening in Nova Scotia 1760–1791 (1982), The Origins of Canadian Politics (1986), and Jute and Empire: The Calcutta Jute Wallahs and the Landscapes of Empire (1998).
Hoisting the British flag at the top of the Tang La. As the British forces crossed the Tang La in January 1904 they paused to raise the Union Jack. It was scenes such as this that convinced Tibetans, and observers in other countries, that the British intended to occupy parts of central Tibet. © Royal Geographical Society.
Journeys to Empire

Enlightenment, Imperialism, and the British Encounter with Tibet, 1774–1904

Gordon T. Stewart
Thou art in the Ka’ba at Mecca
as well as the [Hindu] temple
of Somnath.
Thou art in the monastery,
as well as the tavern.

Thou art at the same time the light
and the moth,
The wine and the cup,
The sage and the fool . . .

Dara Shukoh, “The Compass of
Truth,” in K. R. Qanungo, Dara Shukoh
(Calcutta: S. C. Sarkar, 1952)
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Acknowledgments

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