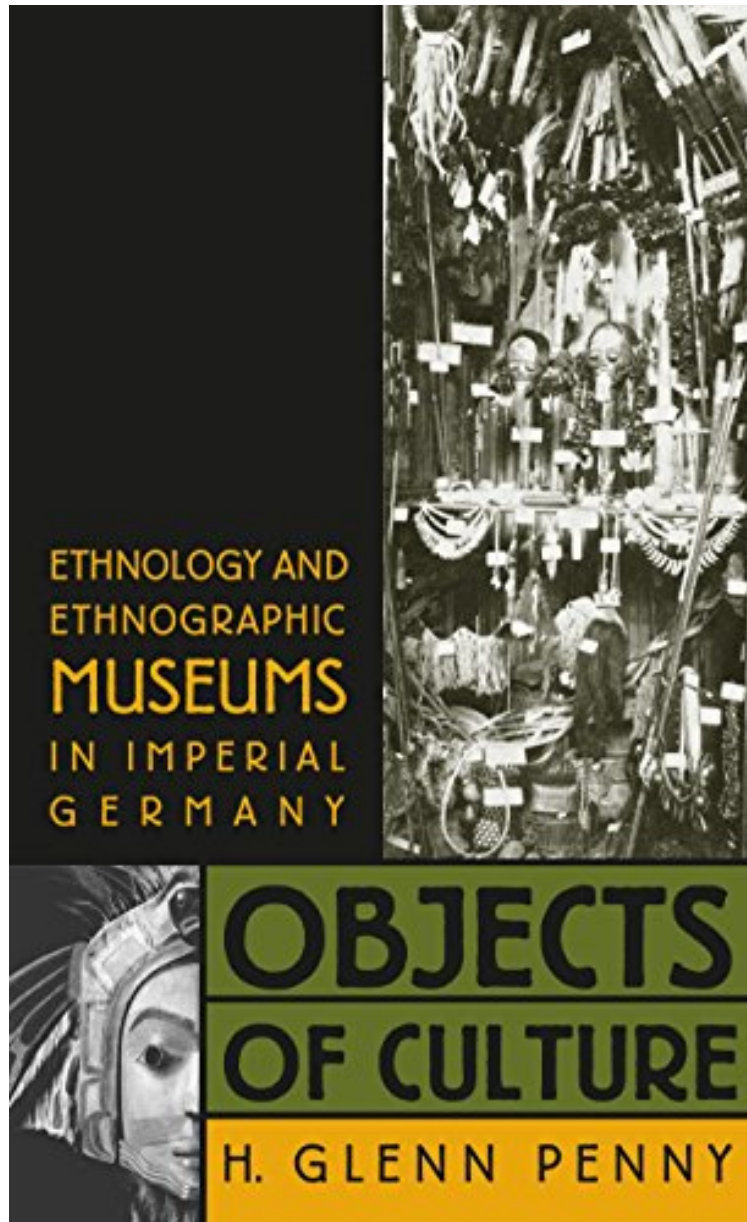


(Download ebook) Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany

Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany

H. Glenn Penny

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H. Glenn Penny : Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. History of the Development of German Ethnographic Museums By Barbara Wavell This book, based on the author's doctoral thesis, is an excellent exploration of the development of ethnographic museums in Germany. These museums originally evolved from scattered ethnographic collections. They were developed and funded as a result of competition between different municipal governments. Originally the stated purpose of such institutions was to understand man kind by collecting exhaustive examples of material culture from "disappearing" societies with a view to understanding them through evaluating these materials. Later there was more of a focus on the public nature of museums and how certain types of displays could make human variation more accessible to the public. One major change was from typological arrangements to geographically oriented arrangements. Display cases went from being packed with examples of spears from a variety of cultures to thoughtful arrangements of objects from a single culture. He discusses problems such as lack of space, need for more labels and the focus on accumulating more and more objects at the expense of cataloging or evaluating them. He gives numerous interesting examples of political strife and also how collecting was carried out in the field in the colonial context including a descriptions of some less than ethical collectors. Overall, for someone who is interested in this topic, this is an excellent book which held my interest throughout.

In the late nineteenth century, Germans spearheaded a worldwide effort to preserve the material traces of humanity, designing major ethnographic museums and building extensive networks of communication and exchange across the globe. In this groundbreaking study, Glenn Penny explores the appeal of ethnology in Imperial Germany and analyzes the motivations of the scientists who created the ethnographic museums. Penny shows that German ethnologists were not driven by imperialist desires or an interest in legitimating putative biological or racial hierarchies. Overwhelmingly antiracist, they aspired to generate theories about the essential nature of human beings through their museums' collections. They gained support in their efforts from boosters who were enticed by participating in this international science and who used it to promote the cosmopolitan character of their cities and themselves. But these cosmopolitan ideals were eventually overshadowed by the scientists' more modern, professional, and materialist concerns, which dramatically altered the science and its goals. By clarifying German ethnologists' aspirations and focusing on the market and conflicting interest groups, Penny makes important contributions to German history, the history of science, and museum studies.

By examining the history of ethnographic museums in Germany with attention to the specificity of local institutional processes, at the same time placing them in an international market framework and the role of conflicting interest groups and audiences, Penny offers an historically grounded contrast to what are by now the somewhat predictable tendencies of post-colonial critical literature. (George W. Stocking, University of Chicago) Penny's thorough and innovative approach make this book a strong introduction to museum culture and the development of ethnology in Imperial Germany. The author adeptly manages a large amount of archival and secondary material without losing the fascinating threads of a story that is well conceived and well told.--German History The achievement of this book is to trace the makeover of a polymorphous science of ethnology and of a budding ethnographic museum culture in Germany . . . from cosmopolitan and humanist ideals into an anti-humanist politics of envisioning global order in a hierarchy of races.--Michael Geyer, University of Chicago [Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany] is a provocative, challenging book that deserves a readership beyond the field of museum history.--H-German By examining the history of ethnographic museums in Germany with attention to the specificity of local institutional processes, at the same time placing them in an international market framework and the role of conflicting interest groups and audiences, Penny offers an historically grounded contrast to what are by now the somewhat predictable tendencies of post-colonial critical literature.--George W. Stocking, University of Chicago From the Inside Flap Penny argues that the scientists who created monumental ethnographic museums in Imperial Germany were driven not by imperialist or racist motives, but by the desire to demonstrate theories about the essential nature of human beings through their museums' collections.