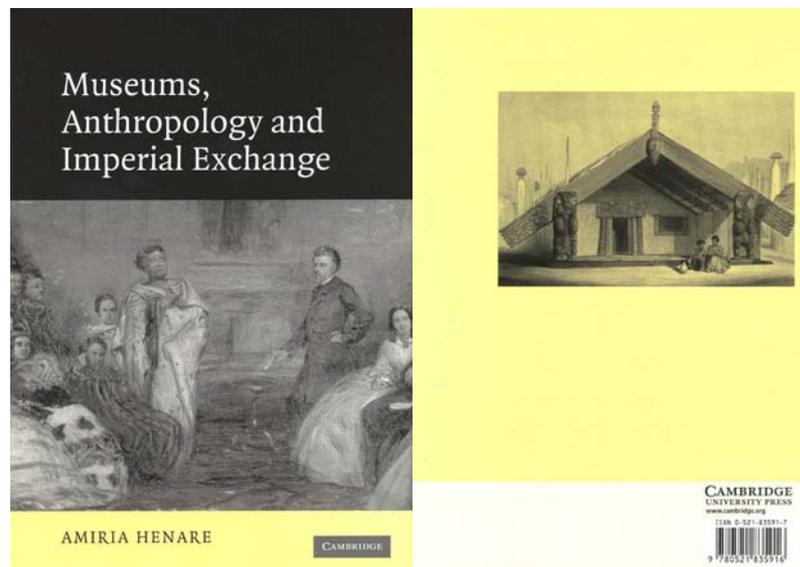


Henare, A.J.M. 2005. Museums, anthropology and imperial exchange. – Cambridge, Cambridge University Press

Book review by S. Ikram



An increasing number of books are being produced on museums, the history of collecting for museums, and the role of material culture in our lives. This work, by Amiria Henare is one such work, but one with an unusual perspective to the history of collections: she traces the movement of ethnographic artefacts between New Zealand and Scotland, with an emphasis on how the collection of the objects influenced anthropological thought at the time.

The book is divided into nine chapters. The first, entitled ‘String games’ explores the idea of the artefact as an individual with a history and life of its own, both before and after its entry into what is generally described as the ‘dead’ or ‘fossilised’ world of the museum. Henare reminds us gently that artefacts in museums move us through time and space, creating a new life for themselves in their new environment, indubitably different from their original function, but still connected with people. The second chapter is called ‘Objects of exploration’, and concerns itself with Maori cloaks that are now in British collections. It uses these as a jumping off point to investigate the relationship between New Zealand, the Maoris, and early explorers. The chapter continues with a discussion on how changes in fashion moved the Maori artefacts from the public eye and led to a diaspora of artefacts in single collections, thereby adding an additional layer, or layers, to their history.

Chapter three, ‘Objects of knowledge’, deals with the epistemological potential of artefacts, and their role in the history of ideas, particularly in the Enlightenment. There are also some delightful *excursi* on the more louche aspects of various men of letters of the era, such as Joseph Banks and James Boswell. The fourth chapter, ‘Improvement and imperial exchange’, relates to museums and collections as places of education and improvement, and how ideas of educating people and improving their lot had an impact on the socio-economic world of Scotland. Practical information, such as studies of ethnographic uses of flax by the Maori, also helped the Scots on a more material level. This chapter also deals with the advent of missionaries, always a key moment in imperialist history. This segues into the following chapter, ‘Colonial baggage’. The chapter provides a brief overview of key anthropological ideas of the time, and a discussion of their proponents and how they impacted the history of New Zealand. The colonisation of New Zealand is vividly covered here, together with a survey of the ideas that served to justify imperial control over New Zealand and other colonies.

The advent of museums in colonised New Zealand is the topic of chapter 6, ‘Storehouses of science’. These were all founded by immigrants and not only contained ethnographic collections, but objects from other colonies as well as Europe. Maori contributions to the Great Exhibition of 1851 also feature in this chapter, together with weaving and other technologies that were shared between the European settlers and the Maori, to mutual benefit. The chapter continues with a discussion of the formation of other collections in Europe and North America, and the understandings of cultures based on the objects as they moved through time and space. The first part of chapter seven, ‘Trophies and souvenirs’, focuses on the acquisition of artefacts through dubious means, and includes fascinating stories about the increasingly brutal interactions between the settlers and the Maoris. The second part of the chapter concentrates on the advent of tourism in New Zealand, starting at the very end of the 19th century. Interestingly, it was tourism that eventually served to rescue the dying Maori population

and traditions in its native land. The establishment of a department of Tourist and Health Resorts in 1902 resulted in the revitalisation of traditional Maori arts and crafts, as well as lifestyles. At approximately the same time (1901), an act was passed in order to restrict the export of traditional Maori artefacts, and provisions made for a national Maori Museum. The parallels between the creation of the romance of the Scottish Highlanders thanks to Walter Scott, and the rejuvenation of the Maoris (who had suffered at the hands of the Scots) and the re-creation of their traditions is ironic, but apposite. The anthropological debates that these 'inventions of tradition' created brought these two areas, as well as anthropological theory, once again into the public eye.

The book's final two chapters are complementary. Chapter eight is entitled 'Things and words', and chapter nine, 'Words and things'. The former deals with the ways of studying social life through the collection and analysis of objects. It covers the collections of several European museums, together with the International Exhibition held in New Zealand, and brings museum and anthropological history, both in Europe and New Zealand into the post Second World War period. The last chapter discusses the changes in attitudes to ethnographic collections and ways of interpreting them, as tied in to evolving anthropological ideas. The movement away from the more archaeological artefact-derived interpretation and definition of a culture to a greater understanding of the intellectual, philosophical, and non-material aspects of a culture are explored within the context of late 20th century anthropological theory. The chapter concludes with a passionate defence of the role of museums in different cultures, and the importance of understanding how these collections formed as being a part of the museum experience and a testament to the history of the collectors, collections, and creators of the objects.

Although some of the theory presented here of what museums are and the history of how they were formed is not new, 'Museums, anthropology and imperial exchange' is an extremely enjoyable read and presents its ideas in a fresh way. It provides a comprehensive look at the history of anthropological thought and theory, illustrated by a very specific case-study of collection history and interaction between New Zealand and Scotland. This subject matter has not really been explored extensively before and makes for extremely interesting reading, as well as providing a novel means of interpreting the history not only of museums, but of anthropology. A bit more information on the current status and types of museums in New Zealand would have been of interest, and less use of the phrase: through time and space might have benefited the book. On the whole, the book is well-written, interesting, engaging, useful, and informative, and can be read by anyone interested in anthropology, museums, history, colonialism, Scotland and the Maoris.

Henare, A.J.M. 2005. *Museums, anthropology and imperial exchange*. – Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 343 pp. ISBN 0521835917. Price £48.00/\$80.00 (hardback).