Weapons, Culture and the Anthropology Museum

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Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

PREDATORY ASSEMBLAGES

ANDY MILLS AND TOM CROWLEY

When a person first has the privilege to spend time in the stores of an ethnographic museum, or to browse through a catalogue of its holdings, it quickly becomes apparent that weapons are everywhere and incredibly numerous. Recent collections surveys in British ethnographic museums show that between one fifth and one third of our World Cultures collections comprise arms and armour (Gathercole and Clarke 1979; Pitt Rivers Museum - The Relational Museum; Shelton 2001). However, when these stored weapon collections are compared with the permanent displays and temporary exhibitions of the same museums, there is (with the notable exception of Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum) a marked absence of arms. Undeniably, there is no obligation for any museum's displays to mirror its collections. And yet there are still unanswered historical questions concerning how and why such a strong typological bias towards weapons arose in ethnographic collections. Why do these collections presently play such a small part in the ethnographic representations of Western museums? Furthermore, what can an understanding of weaponry's museological history add to the broader history of anthropological collecting and museums?

Weaponry's neglect in 20th century material culture studies has arguably been more damaging than its visual erasure from anthropological galleries. The primary ethnographic surveys and oral histories of many societies recorded in the fifty years around the turn of the twentieth century brim with details on weapons and warfare; however, even the anthropological literature on violent conflict from the remaining decades of the 20th century shows little engagement with that data. In most cases, we do not even have studies establishing the basic typological variation within these vast artefact assemblages. This leaves the study of "ethnographic" weapons in a peculiar position: Museums are surfeited with an embarrassment of available collections, and there is copious

contextualising ethnohistorical data; yet we generally lack basic formal and cultural characterisations of the kind that would constitute the first steps in any study of historical Western arms or archaeological material.

A principal motivation behind the 2015 conference at London's Horniman Museum and Gardens that led to this volume was a shared view among museum professionals and anthropologists of art, that recent analytical and interpretive developments in material culture studies and museology have substantially bypassed ethnographic weapon collections. Techniques of typological classification and manufacture analysis have advanced; bodies of ethnohistorical source literature have come to wider publication and greater synthesis; the hermeneutic toolkit of anthropologists and historians has become ever more diversified and sophisticated; but their application to the largest typological division of ethnographic collections has been scant at best. Considerable ethnohistorical insight lies dormant in the unwritten cultural and stylistic histories of North and South American, African, Asian and Oceanic arms; in the clubs, spears, axes, swords, bows, arrows, armour, shields and other weapon forms of these regions. The chapters in this volume demonstrate what can be learned by applying modern methods of ethnohistorical and ethnographic material culture studies to arms. Although weapons have long been a legitimate subject of art historical enquiry in Europe and Eastern Asia, such studies generally lack the anthropologist's sensitivity to cultural specificity and the social historian's sensitivity to the currents of cultural change. Even this long-studied material, then, presents great opportunity to write more sophisticated sociocultural histories of arms and armour.

We can broadly define a weapon as any tool that increases or decreases asymmetrical physical power in hostile interactions with human and non-human others. This definition encompasses not only arms and armour, but also traps, snares and fishing gear, sorceries, chemical and biological agents, domesticated animals, restraints, torture implements, sensory and psychological disruptions, propaganda, vehicles, surveillance and electronic warfare equipment; the list is enormous and constantly expanding. Sticks and unmodified stones were the earliest tools our remote hominid ancestors turned to combative ends, and as our technological capabilities have developed, so has our seemingly inevitable weaponisation of them. Indeed, the pursuit of military advantages has frequently driven fundamental transformations in material culture more generally – most notably in metallurgy, engineering and communications (Milward and Saul 2012; Williams 2012). Law's (1991) well-known distinction between *power to* and *power over* highlights the ambiguity of our relationship with arms and armour: Weapons enable or empower defensive action against

humans and other animals that would predate on us, our communities and our economic resources. They also enable us to become predatory, to control our own and other communities, and to seize economic resources by force. Even the modern nation state's maintenance of peaceful social spaces is regularly punctuated by small-scale violence, and only ensured by the peripheral presence of rapidly available military or paramilitary force. Peace, like war, is always relative, local and temporary; weaponry remains a necessary evil for the foreseeable future. Most weapons spend almost their entire existence *not* performing the violent function for which they have been manufactured; many are destroyed if ever used; and yet they are often carried or worn for large periods of time. This strongly predisposes them to a secondary function of signification and display, which has had a profound effect on their cultural history throughout the world. Their occurrence in cultural contexts of political contestation, social stratification, genderised performance, ritual practice, cosmological modelling, economic relations, sport and the performative arts, illustrates their character as a total social fact with significance far beyond the limited context of violence itself. To systematically omit their consideration in the study of culture is therefore to fashion a distorted ethnographic representation. Here, in this volume, we pursue an accepting, critical and global engagement with violence's material culture and representation.

Ethnographic Weapon Collections before Museums

The collection and display of weapons are cross-cultural phenomena, and several contributions to this volume address the rich cultural treatment of such artefacts within their local context of production. From the *silleh-kana* armouries of Rajput courts in India, to the accumulations of sacred weapons in the *bure* temples of pre-Christian Fiji, we can identify a strong predisposition towards weaponry's accumulation and display as tokens of power (Robinson 1967; Clunie 2013). There is a particular materiality that weapons add to dramatic narratives of violent inter-ethnic conflict, because the spatial boundaries of political structures and material culture styles are often broadly coterminous. A resultant tendency to read weapons as culturally specific and identity-signifying is therefore cross-cultural - as attested by their like-for-like trade across ethnic boundaries as curiosities, battlefield trophies and masculine souvenirs. The history of non-Western weapons in museums, and weapons in ethnographic museums, however, is both part of the general Western history of

collecting and displaying weapons, and one current within the histories of European colonialism and anthropological thought.

Locally produced weapons were displayed inside aristocratic Western European homes during the Middle Ages. The bearing of arms was the exclusive right of the medieval European aristocracy, and as the system of armorial bearings spread from the battlefield to civic architecture and domestic interiors during the 12th century, so the iconography of arms became a generalised decorative scheme signifying wealth, power and high birth (Woodcock 1988). The recognition of stylistic differences in arms as ethnically-specific (and correlated to known tactical methods) was well-established in European thinking about warfare by this time. The crusading campaigns of the 11th-13th centuries brought a constant stream of superior Middle Eastern and North African weaponry into the courts and markets of Europe as both curiosities and battlefield trophies (Ettinghausen 1974; Mack 2002). In this remote period, therefore, a display of weapons already constituted a meta-artefactual assemblage for the representation of asymmetrical power as self-aggrandisement on one hand, and as the asserted conquest of formidable enemies on the other. These two basic functions continue to influence the interpretation and display of weapons today, if only as heuristic representations illustrative of a residual ethnocentrism we now seek to deconstruct. From these nebulous origins, two main forms of weaponry's collection and display in architectural interiors emerged -the armoury gallery and the hunting trophy room- which were ancestral to the ethnographic weapons gallery proper.

Most of the large European monarchies established centralised arsenals and armouries during the early renaissance, industrialising the large-scale production and innovation of arms, armour and ordnance: The *Arsenale Nuovo* in Venice by 1320, the *Royal Armouries* at the Tower of London by the 1420s, the *Kremlin Armoury* in 1508, *L'Arsenal de Paris* in the mid-1500s (Davis 2007; Faure 2002; Goncharenko 1995; Williams and De Reuck 1998). By the mid-16th century, several of these armouries were open to visiting dignitaries, military officers and working armourers for the purposes of diplomacy, curiosity and technical study. As early as the 1660s, for example, the Tower of London had a chronologically-ordered linear public gallery of luxurious royal armour, and a *Spanish Armoury* of battlefield trophies – instantiating three dominant trends which defined the armoury gallery: the showcasing of exceptional workmanship, the recording of stylistic chronology, and the ideological representation of ethnically-specific events of the enemy's just conquest, or their barbaric victory (Impey and Parnell 2000). This emergence of the armoury as a

discrete institutional space for both the development and the competitive display of military technology was fundamental to the reframing of arms as deserving spectatorial consideration. The exaltation of the armourer's art was an emphatically masculine and elite cultural movement, expressive of European society's widening intercontinental horizons and rapidly advancing metallurgy. Moreover, both the technology and methodology of European warfare had undergone radical transformation during the renaissance: firearms and plate armour advanced more rapidly than hand weapons and cavalry methods; battles were increasingly waged by rigidly drilled units of homogenously armed and armoured infantrymen with pike and musket (Wanklyn and Jones 2014; Ward 1639). Over time, armoury galleries came to represent the ethnically distinctive, individualistic and antique in marked distinction to this homogeneity, and therefore became intrinsically anachronistic, culturally essentialising, and romanticised.

A second ancestral form of European weapons display that arose concurrently with the armoury gallery was the hunting trophy room: a symbolic extension of the hunting endeavour into an emphatically masculine and culturally prominent leisure space (Luke 1998). Although discrete architectural spaces for the display of hunting trophies and arms were known in Roman times, and Indo-European literature has glorified the royal hunt for more than four millennia, hunting became a principal form of conspicuous recreational consumption for the Western European nobility only in later medieval times (Allsen 2011). We consequently find luxurious hunting lodges springing up for the rulers of England, France and the Italian states during the 16th and 17th centuries. By the 18th century, Gothic-style *jagdschloss* hunting lodges were also being built in the German states as pleasure palaces for aristocratic recreation (Lass 2006). As the hunting lodge's representational focal point, the trophy room represented a specific style of elite domestic interior which brought the display of taxidermy trophies and hunting weapons together as a masculinist confection of artefactual means and animal ends (Desmond 2008; Luke, *ibid.*). Both animal and artefactual specimens occupy parallel semiotic positions within the display as trophies of a cumulative typological specimen-collecting project, becoming mnemonic elicitation devices for biographical narratives about the subject under scrutiny and the narrator's victorious encompassing encounter with them. From a Baudrillardian (2005) perspective, this kind of interior generates the atmospheric values of a predatory control over the natural world, evidencing the owner and his ancestors as individuals with the material, physical and psychological means of killing at their disposal; it was itself, therefore, a transformation of the hereditary professional violence -

knighthood- that ultimately led most European aristocratic families into their ruling positions.

Within both the armoury gallery and the trophy room, the dangerous nature of weapons recommends them to flat display against walls, above head height, propped upright in corners or racks, hung above fireplaces and doors, etc. Armour demands a supporting armature to be viewed meaningfully, while most offensive weapons are long and narrow, and aesthetically suggest arrangement conventions of parallel rows or columns. Many weapons are wider and more interesting at the head or handle, suggesting other solutions of alternating heads at each end of a row, or arranging weapons radially into fans or wheels. Spatial juxtaposition and clustering elicit processes of selection and comparison that organically lead to arrangements of aesthetically-informed stylistic classification. From the capacity to make such spatial arrangements stems the ability to build an art historical narrative as solitary experience, or as an elicitation device for discussion.

A key point here concerning the role of weapon collections in the development of museums is that the armoury gallery and hunting trophy room were essential antecedent interiors of the Enlightenment *cabinet of curiosities*. These two pre-existing forms of weaponry and taxidermy display amalgamated with one another, the picture gallery, library, and sculpture garden, into a unified system of organisational principles that centrally defined the general museum model. The primary display conventions characterising the 17th and 18th century arrangement of archaeological finds, anthropological curiosities, costume and natural history were therefore directly derived from the shared conventions of the trophy room and the armoury (*cf* Kaeppler 2011; Schepelern 1990). We see the same aesthetic solutions applied to the display of tools, non-defensive costume, birds, shells and minerals (indeed, all smaller three-dimensional objects) throughout the early modern period. In the first instance, therefore, ethnographic arms were arranged through the same organisational principles as antiquarian displays of weaponry and armorial bearings. Insofar as the armoury in particular, but also the trophy room, had long concerned themselves with the recognition of ethnically-specific technological differences in arms, they were intrinsically ethnographic *ab initio*. Indeed, all subsequent organisational rubrics for the display of ethnographic weapons were essentially minor revisions to this defining template.

Early Imperialism and the Global Weapons Trade

The European mass production, distribution and use of sophisticated arms -and the tactics of their use- were defining components of the colonial process. This truism should be restated here, as it was through an inverting cultural manoeuvre of sublimating colonialism's violent conquest into a civilising enterprise -what Kipling (1899) latterly called *the white man's burden*- that the weaponry of non-Western peoples became material signs of that Western ideological representation which Bernard Smith (1985) termed *ignoble savagery*. Western violence to the ethnic Other was alchemically transmuted into a projected preoccupation with the violence of those Others; a discursive handmaiden of the desire to pacify subjugated populations in order to achieve the transition from unstable military theatre to stable vassal economy (O'Hanlon 1999; Rodman and Cooper 1979). Informed by medieval cultural tropes of the skin-wearing, forest-dwelling, club-wielding *wild man* (Husband and Gilmore-House 1980), Native American warriors were dehumanised along the lines of Shakespeare's *"demi-devil"* Caliban; illiterate, brutal and rapacious, heathen and witch-born, his physical nature an ill-starred deformation from that of the European (Shakespeare 1611; Vaughan and Vaughan 1991). Hobbes' (1651) imagined prehistoric state of the *"warre of all against all"* equally informed a growing European conflation of contemporary small-scale polities and hand-to-hand skirmishing with the ungoverned savagery of remote antiquity.

Concurrently, a converse idea of Native American and other indigenous fighting men as embodying admirable essentialised values of predatory and martial masculinity -*noble savagery*- also developed in the works of essayists such as Montaigne (1580) and philosophers such as the Third Earl of Shaftesbury (Cooper 1999). Such positive interpretive perspectives on indigenous non-Western martiality unquestionably enabled the military alliances with local rulers that characterised European territorial expansion into every other region of the globe during the 17th and 18th centuries. While these two representational constructs of ignoble and noble savagery were not merely elaborations on a simple dichotomy of enemies or allies, it would be naïve to see them as wholly unrelated to tendentious Western motivations.

As material texts extracted from their native contexts, the status of non-Western weapons exported first to colonial settlements, and then to Europe itself, interacted powerfully with these two discursive constructions for Western consumers. Native North American, Arctic and West African weaponry trickled back into Europe along the Atlantic sea-routes of the

slave, gold, ivory, whaling, sugar, tobacco and fur trades from the 17th century onwards. Their value as artificial curiosities for trade, contemplation, discussion or collection resided in points of their morphological character resonating with the projected moral and technological traits of *ignoble* or *noble savagery*: Cruelty versus strength, improvisation versus workmanship, rudeness versus chemical or mechanical complexity; the same formal traits might be reconciled with either set of moral traits as motivation and ideology dictated.

British, French and Dutch colonial expansion into the Indian subcontinent, Indian Ocean ports, Southeast Asia, Oceania and Pacific Northwest during the long 18th century further diversified the range of arms available on the European curiosities market as by-commodities of the trades in tea, porcelain, spices, opium and Canada furs (Wild 1999; Parthesius 2010). The influence of curved, one-edged Indo-Persian *shamshir* on European cavalry swords engendered a particular demand for South Asian arms in the West, as did the remarkable aesthetic and physical properties of Damascus watered steel (Sachse and Knighton 2008). It is therefore sensible to recognise that the consumption of exotica in Europe was exerting a centripetal force along colonial trade routes throughout the Modern period, which had material effects on production levels and artefact styles as far afield as Amazonia and Melanesia by the 19th century (Douglas and Isherwood 2002; Thomas 2009; Wolf 2010).

High Imperialism and the Anthropological Museum

As the neoclassical influences of the early 19th century gave way to the Gothic Revival style in Victorian Britain, its medieval evocations and aesthetic influences drew evermore strongly on the organisational principles of the armoury gallery and the hunting trophy room. This caused demand for antique weapons to far exceed the availably supply, and elicited two responses from curiosity dealers: first, there was an increase in replica and fake European arms and armour production in a range of period styles (Tavares 2013; see Crowley, this volume). Second, there was a move to incorporate arms and armour from beyond Europe into domestic interiors as a substitute for European antiques and a militaristic aspect of broader emerging Orientalist tastes (Gaillard, Walter and Mellor 2011). Because most of Europe's ethnographic museum collections were founded during the 19th century, the aesthetic values of the baronial hall had a determinant effect on the characteristic style of ethnographic galleries at Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum, Cambridge's

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, the Horniman Museum and elsewhere.

Beyond Europe, however, as colonial settler populations and their demand for agricultural land increased over the 19th century, so too did local military resistance to their impositions. This in turn led social and economic differences in indigenous cultures to be reframed by the Europeans as antagonistic to colonial ambitions. In response, the Western system of retributive justice fostered a rash of punitive expeditions and enforced disarmament in many parts of the world (Ballard and Douglas 2017; see West, and Rowlands, this volume); several notable Western museum collections of ethnographic arms originated in precisely such circumstances. Motors of social and technological change -enforced pacification and disarmament, Christian mission, the importation of small arms and light ordnance, engagement with the economic world system- redefined the local value of traditional weapon forms. Some became tactically obsolete; others cosmologically problematic for Christian converts; many became most valuable as export commodities for the acquisition of Western trade goods. This noted, several of the contributions to this volume (notably the chapters by Hkangda and Lotter) reveal the remarkable resilience that some traditional weapon forms have demonstrated against these forces of cultural and technological change.

Historians of anthropology have long recognised the discipline's early complicity in European imperialist expansion (Barnard 2000; Eriksen and Nielsen 2017). A centrally undirected but nevertheless evermore systematic programme of ethnographic survey was undertaken by Western visitors, colonists, administrators and missionaries from the late 18th century onwards. Alongside economic systems and resources, this programme was strategically concerned with understanding the sociopolitical structures, military organisation, and arms of the world's peoples. That ethnographic collecting should therefore be significantly biased towards arms and armour is not surprising. A clear male gender-bias in Westerners trading elsewhere, and forming durable collections in Europe, strongly increased the popularity of weapons as ethnographica. Moreover, a strong 19th century Western presence throughout the world was that of Christian missionaries (Findlay and Holdsworth 1921; Lovett 1899; Goodall 1954). While missionary influence occasionally exacerbated levels of conflict in some African or Oceanic societies by fostering ideological struggle, medium-term pacification was central to their evangelism. Converted populations were encouraged to donate weapons as a demonstration of commitment to Christian pacifism, and to provide missionary organisations with saleable curiosities to financially support the mission

elsewhere (Jacobs, Knowles and Wingfield 2014). A large but now unmeasurable proportion of the non-Western weapons circulating on the global art market today reached Europe through missionary networks of the 19th century.

Because weaponry is a universal material culture category, and consequently all societies may be compared in relation to it, it was implicated early in ethnological theory. It played an instrumental role in the racial hierarchies of Lewis Henry Morgan's (1877) cultural evolutionism. Among other technologies and social institutions, it was the absence of the bow in precolonial Australia which led Morgan to rank Aboriginal Australians below other races within his hierarchy of unilinear development; the absence of iron-forged blades which he used to place the native people of the Americas below those of the Old World; the development of plate armour and firearms which he used to place Eurasian technology above African. Cultural evolutionism grossly overemphasised the significance of technology and political centralisation in determining ontology; overlooked notable exceptions to its own criteria; and reified a series of historically-specific technological discoveries and communications into a racial hierarchy which might justify the subordination of non-Western peoples. This teleological 19th century fiction used the tactical advantages of Western military technology as motifs that intellectualised and naturalised its bloody imperialist outcomes. As well as politically pernicious, cultural evolutionist ideas inhibited the proper documentation and study of non-Western weapons by fostering a misplaced contempt for them.

The Victorian archaeologist and ethnologist, General Augustus Pitt Rivers, sought to refine cultural evolutionism into a dynamic diachronic theory: typological diffusionism (Pitt Rivers 1906; Bowden 1991). His vast personal collection of international arms was instrumental to diffusionism's development; it was only during the later 19th century that comparatively complete regional collections of arms and armour began to coalesce in the private museums of wealthy individuals such as Pitt Rivers, Henry Christy, Henry Wellcome and Frederick Horniman, as well as a few major institutions such as the British Museum and Oxford's Ashmolean Museum. A pioneer of the regional modelling of archaeological cultures through the recognition of stylistic variation in material culture, Pitt Rivers' diffusionist ethnological models were primarily concerned with etically-identified points of technological and stylistic difference between weapon forms, and were heavily informed by aesthetic motivations to make a cohesive and heuristic display of the assemblage as a meta-artefact. In this sense, typological diffusionism was simply a

projection of the armoury gallery and trophy room's pre-existing aesthetic and narrative organisation principles onto an abstracted plane of geographical and historical interpretation.

Diffusionist modelling was superior to earlier unilinear evolutionism, insofar as it acknowledged that non-Western material culture also underwent communication and dynamic change. However, diffusionism failed to recognise the existence of historically unrelated convergent technologies. This led to a preoccupation in the writings of Henry Balfour and other later exponents of diffusionism with explaining the complex mosaic of spatio-temporal distributions demonstrated by mechanically sophisticated weapons from Oceania, Africa and Asia (Balfour 1888, 1901a, 1901b, 1901c, 1909, 1922). Notably, while diffusionist studies often did produce historically meaningful interpretations at a local or regional scale, their capacity to provide useful inferences on a continental or intercontinental scale was virtually non-existent. Theories of unilinear cultural evolution endured longer in museum displays than in anthropological theory itself: The early 20th century displays of London's Horniman Museum, for example, were organised regionally along a north-south axis of cultural evolution by H.S. Harrison. Harrison espoused technological evolutionism through his publications and gallery arrangements, which remained on display well into the mid-20th century (Harrison 1930a, 1930b). Likely recalling sickening imperialist massacres such as those of the Indian Rebellion (1857), Wounded Knee (1890) and Omdurman (1898) through a lens of manifest destiny, Harrison wrote in one guide to the Horniman's displays, *"Many races and peoples have been left behind in the advance of invention, and the savage armed with club and spear may sacrifice himself against the magazine rifle and the machine gun"* (1908: 4).

Decolonialisation, Aversion, Marginalisation, Fantasy

The early 20th century represents the terminal phase of museums accessioning ethnographic weapons in any meaningful numbers. Western arms manufacturers and colonists had spent a century or more exporting mass produced blades and small firearms across the world, supplanting all but the most culturally-significant local weapon forms (Headrick 1979; Krause 1995). As this was happening, remote areas of the Amazon, northern Asia and the New Guinea interior were becoming accessible to Western travellers and collectors for the first time, meaning that the regional make-up of weapons circulating on the ethnographic art market shifted considerably in the closing decades of its central phase. The

widespread stabilisation and pacification of colonial government in most regions led to a shift in non-Western militarism, and in Western cultural constructions of it: the acculturating programmes of later colonialism came to their logical conclusion, and non-Western military technology and methods converged almost completely with Western practices. This rendered museum galleries of 19th century non-Western weaponry increasingly anachronistic, framed as they were within the dehistoricised ethnographic present asserted by anthropological displays throughout much of the 20th century.

Although the early 20th century classification and display of ethnographic weapon collections continued to be influenced by the armoury gallery, trophy room, and cultural evolutionist systems of interpretation, the encyclopaedic classificatory movement of Edwardian science led the collecting and curation of ethnographic material culture towards an analogously totalising systematisation of diversity. Diffusionist model-making had been driven by a similar accumulation of artefacts as spatio-temporal data-points, but when excised of its ambitions towards grand culture-historic narrative, the result was a form of classificatory panopticism; apprehending and encompassing human cultural diversity as a self-validating exercise in spectatorial control -a high colonial controlling gaze- from and through the enclosed comfort of the museum gallery space.

The 20th century's two World Wars, widely disseminated through print journalism and moving pictures, transformed Western popular attitudes to warfare, diluting its false romanticism (Szabo 1983; Lawrence 2003). As this cultural shift occurred, postcolonial critique and imperialist self-consciousness developed in Western society over the middle decades of the century, leading such displays of 19th century African, Asian or Pacific weaponry to elicit increasingly problematic associations with the anachronistic and racist stereotypes of the European right wing, rather than the growing cultural relativism of contemporary anthropological theory. The counterfactual framing of mechanised warfare as more civilised, and handcrafted arms as primitive and barbaric, had become so naturalised in Western culture that the display of traditional non-Western arms became inextricably charged with the politics of racial stereotypy.

At this crucial moment in the dismantling of imperialist ethnocentrism in anthropological museology, there was great potential for ethnographers, ethnologists and curators to engage in a reflexive critical evaluation of the utility, representational implications and research opportunities offered by such vast collections. It could have been that scholars reformulated an analytical and interpretive approach sensitive to historical and contemporary

social realities, alongside a sensibility to violence's cultural complexity. Regrettably, such an alternate history remained precisely that: what actually occurred was the gradual elimination of weapons from ethnographic galleries by progressive redisplay, in the sanitising representational pursuit of ethnic otherness as devoid of violence and negative interactions; one misrepresentation of pejorative ethnocentric distortion was merely replaced by another of tendentious anxious-avoidant censorship.

Our curatorial and art historical relationship to ethnographic weaponry demands to be seen in specific historical and cultural context, with reference to the changing role and representation of organised violence in Western society. Since the 1500s, the Western Powers have developed ever more sophisticated technologies of human destruction, distributed them across the world by trade and conquest, and waged war against colonised peoples and each other. At the same time, the widespread professionalisation of soldiering under increasingly centralised government; the pacification and disarmament of the public; the increasing legal control of hunting, slaughtering, blood sports, corporal and capital punishment; these late modern transformations have thankfully rendered a contemporary Western life more isolated from violence than any before (Pinker 2011). For many, violence is now merely the content of our Hollywood blockbusters, console games, social media posts, or everyday foreign news items. We are both overexposed and desensitised to its fantastical representation, as we are concurrently cocooned from its realities. An understandable aversion to distant, horrific social ruptures one is powerless to influence, but which often have their historical roots or immediate causes in Western military action, has created both distortions and gross omissions in the last half-century's scholarship on the political landscape and military history of Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas. These aversions have inhibited the historical interpretation of precolonial social realities and colonial injustices alike. They have perpetuated a widespread failure to apply sophisticated material culture analysis to non-Western weapons. They add the insult of our disregarding these fine artworks' to the injury of their almost complete appropriation from the original cultural contexts in which they were manufactured, used and highly valued.

The Aims and Structure of the Volume

The chapters in this volume seek to redress the neglected study of historical world weaponry, and their display in ethnographic museums,

and they represent a broad diversity of approaches to the subject. The volume is ordered into three parts, each drawing out a set of common themes. The foundations of all these contributions lie in reinterpretation and the restitution of meaning: each author seeks to restore a wealth of ethnographic or ethnohistorical context, to posit a postcolonial equivocation of historical events, to reframe the principles of museum display for arms, or to reconsider the cultural status of weapons in general. Even within the restricted field of ethnographic weapons, however, they cannot be conceived as either an exhaustive demonstration of scholarly approaches, or as geographically comprehensive. Nevertheless, they do represent both the breadth and quality of new research in this area, raising the standard of scholarship on non-Western weapons to that which has been enjoyed by other classes of material culture for some decades.

Part One, *Restoring Historical Context*, addresses the particular propensity of weapons to become both the vehicles of historical narrative and cultural memory in many social formations, and also (recursively) their prominence in historic moments of social trauma and transformation. In this regard, their cultural construction is both rich and complex, and frequently surprising in its impact. In Chapter One, Andy West discusses how the pejorative identities constructed during conflict have informed the collection of ethnographic weaponry. Taking the vast and diverse region of upland Southeast Asia which has recently been named Zomia as his case study, and the British Army's *Abor Expedition* of 1911 as his particular focus, West reveals how colonial collecting policies demonstrate imperialist conceptions of ethnic minority and frontier peoples at the time; conceptions with a cultural legacy that persists to the present day in South Asia. West argues that museum displays of weaponry represent an important means by which such cultural bias can be laid bare. In Chapter Two, Shawn Rowlands draws out analogous themes that intersect in the cultural biography of one remarkable shield from the Kimberley region of northern Western Australia: punitive expeditions and massacres on the blurred boundaries of imperial rule; weapons as trophies and memorials of conflict across cultural contexts; the playing out of asymmetrical power relationships in the collecting and curation of arms.

For Claudia Augustat in Chapter Three, Amazonian weapons offer three case studies of cultural memory formation. While earlier ethnographers frequently read Amerindian weapons as the cultural locus of sociobiological or economistic mechanisms of social reproduction, she shows that weapons can conversely serve as cultural vehicles of male intercommunity alliance, ceremonial conflict resolution, and even collective forgetting. Framed within the appropriate cultural context,

Augustat therefore shows us that implements of destruction may operate in emphatically constructive ways. In Chapter Four, Nikolaus Stolle draws Part One of the volume to a close by demonstrating the value of a meticulous ethnohistorical approach to the cultural contextualisation of one specific tradition of weapons manufacture and use. Through painstaking research, he convincingly refutes a longstanding major cultural misattribution of eastern North American war-club styles. Moreover, Stolle also reconstructs a fascinating representation of the eastern Native American club as central to a complex iconographic system integrating the personal kill-claiming of warriors with the oral history of warfare in the region. Each of these four chapters shows that we have a great deal to gain from a historical and historiographical reconsideration of weaponry in a broader context of regional modelling and postcolonial relativism.

In Part Two, *Representing Cultural Complexity*, our contributors demonstrate the wealth of ethnographic and ethnological meaning to be uncovered by the focused study of weapons as a discrete category of material culture; not only that meaningfulness inherent in such richly elaborated artefacts themselves, but also their extension into all spheres of human life as particularly compelling material metaphors. Another distinctive feature of Part Two is its breadth of methodological and interpretive approaches. In Chapter Five, Stephanie Lotter tackles one of the most ubiquitous weapons in ethnographic collections: The Nepalese *khukuri*, asking how such a particular weapon came to be so widely accessioned. In engaging with her question, Lotter reveals a dynamic story of evolving Nepali-British relations, and throws light on the social processes through which ethnographic weapons often come to be in museums. Picking up a theme echoed elsewhere in this volume, Lotter uses the *khukuri* to illustrate how the multiple cultural meanings and functions of weapons are all too often lost when accessioned into museum collections; falling foul of a prevalent practice whereby etic morphological typologies serve as the primary means through which to interpret them, in lieu of ethnographic data on emic classificatory systems. In Chapter Six, Gumring Hkangda offers a valuable source community perspective on the collection of ethnographic weaponry. Taking the Kachin swords of Myanmar as his study, he draws on personal experience and scholarly research to record precisely those understandings which are often lost at the point of collection. Crucially, Hkangda discusses Kachin swords in both historical *and* contemporary contexts, highlighting the fiction of cultural stasis which ethnographic museums seem fated to impose on their collections.

In Chapter Seven, Policarp Hortolà's paper on New Guinea bone daggers demonstrates the utility of applying scanning electron microscopy in technical art history to establish the most basic detail of a weapon's cultural biography: was it ever used to shed blood, and was that blood human or animal? Beyond its application to the reconstruction of cultural biographies for individual artefacts, broader application of this methodology opens up interpretive pathways to the empirical exploration of whether specific weapon types were ceremonial or dancing implements, works of tourist art, or hunting implements; an area which is particularly confused in the study of Oceanic weapons at the present time. In Chapter Eight, Milene Cresenz-Rossi explores one of Oceania's least-known weaponry traditions: that of the Western Islands of Manus Province in northern Papua New Guinea. As she shows, even in this little-known archipelago on the edge of the Pacific Ocean, reappraisal and synthesis of the available ethnographic and historical data, in conjunction with the survey of museum collections, can both rediscover lost cultural significances, and redress the ethnocentric misinterpretations of past scholarship. In Chapter Nine, Andy Mills closes Part Two of the volume by offering a cross-cultural synthesis drawing on three case studies: the spear named the *Luín of Celtchar* from Early Medieval Ireland, the war-club *Mohekonokono* of early 19th century Tonga, and the shortsword *Keris Berhantu* of 19th century Malaysia. Mills argues for deep ethnological commonality in the ways that humans conceptualise sentient weapons - and by extension, all weaponry. His semiotic exploration identifies five shared attributes integral to each cultural context's relationship with agentive weaponry. By discussing weapons with a will of their own, Mills draws viable conclusions concerning the cross-cultural character of weaponry in general, and the common psychodynamic realities of the combat veteran.

Part Three of the volume, *Redisplaying World Arms*, turns from questions of the ethnohistorical, ethnographic and ethnological, to consider specific questions of world weaponry's museological interpretation and the history of world cultures collections. In Chapter Ten, Natasha Bennett draws on her curatorial experience at the UK's Royal Armouries to provide a fine-grained account of the development and display of its South Asian collections. The Armouries' current Oriental Gallery successfully situates objects in representations of their original use context, but Bennett asks whether this is enough. The imperialist mentalities and philosophies which informed the collection of the objects remain concealed from the visitor. This metaphorical elephant in the room -a cousin of the gallery's iconic armoured beast- unless confronted,

threatens to destabilise the Armouries' pedagogical agenda. In Chapter Eleven, Navjot Mangat and Jasdeep Singh Rahal elaborate further on this theme by relating their valuable experience in conducting community consultation on the curation of the National Army Museum's new *Insight Gallery*. The authors worked with British Ghanaian and British Sikh communities and their comparison between the two community responses is enlightening. Whilst the Sikh community engaged with collections from a religious perspective, the Ghanaians' interpretation was informed by a sense of national identity. Mangat and Singh Rahal's careful discussion of their work as facilitators reveals the immense value that diaspora community insights can add to museum collections.

In Chapter Twelve, Tom Crowley demonstrates the power of cultural biographies to elucidate the multiple and contested histories of museum objects. Taking for his subject that most disturbing and controversial of weapon types, the torture implement, Crowley presents a discursive archaeology of one of the Horniman Museum's most iconic artefacts – a torture chair long associated with the Spanish Inquisition. Crowley's chapter emphasises that our curatorial representations of weaponry are as subject to ethnocentric bias and tendentiousness as textual histories. In the final chapter, Robert Woosnam-Savage approaches a fundamental question pertaining to the museology of all weapons, through the lens of European arms: Why do we sanitise the representation of human violence through exhibitions, and how might we reframe the exhibition of warfare, wounds and death to more closely approximate a truthful representation? What, indeed, is the representational responsibility of a museum to its visitors? Creating palatable child-friendly experiences for all, or provoking discussion, contemplation and personal growth in adults? These are not, Woosnam-Savage rightly argues, mutually exclusive in a well-crafted exhibitions programme, and here he offers practical observations and strategies to that end. In making these recommendations, Woosnam-Savage demonstrates a fundamental truth evinced by each of the chapters in this volume: it is only by interrogating the human condition in all its extremity, as well as its neutrality, that we may come to know it better.

PART ONE:

RESTORING HISTORICAL CONTEXT

CHAPTER ONE

CONTEXTUALISING ETHNOGRAPHIC WEAPONS IN MUSEUMS: THE 1911 "ABOR EXPEDITION" - REPRESENTATIONS AND CONFLICT PAST AND PRESENT

ANDY WEST

Introduction

When I first worked in an ethnography museum, coming from a local history museum, I was astonished at the quantity of weapons in store. Shelves and racks of spears, clubs, knives, swords, shields, bows, arrows, basketry "helmets" and coconut fibre "armour". I didn't find much of it particularly interesting, but neither had I been engaged by the regimental collection at the local history museum: fancy uniforms, swords, ornamental silver and china, status decorations - all rather officer-based. Juxtaposition of the two collections did not occur to me. The local history collection and the geographically varied collections of the ethnography museum were presented as from separate peoples with implicitly separate histories. This separation had been emphasised a few years earlier when the local history museum reinforced its local credentials by disposing of "foreign" natural history and material culture. Ethnographic museums took in those discards to support portrayals of foreign lives in other "bounded" cultures, generally in a timeless "ethnographic present".

Use of "ethnographic" material in museums is now seen to require more consideration of both its original purpose and collection context. Understanding the context of ethnographic collections involves an engagement with, and examination of, the ways in which two histories (of collector and collected people) become entangled, and meet around the time and place of collection (Thomas 1991). Weapons in museum