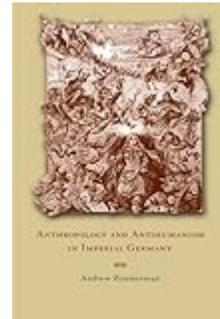


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in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Andrew Zimmerman. *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001. v + 364 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-226-98342-4.



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Andrew Zimmerman's study of anthropology in Germany is much more than an analysis of a scholarly discipline. While carefully reconstructing the intellectual background and social position of nineteenth-century anthropology and anthropologists, Zimmerman also frames his topic in surprising ways. "Anthropology had its roots in popular culture," he tells us, and a location in an expanding public sphere of popular scientific discourse (p. 4). Correspondingly, the reader's initial glimpse of the anthropologist as scientist comes through the atmosphere of Berlin's *Voelkerschauen* and via the eyes and experiences of the people brought to the city for the entertainment of the local population. Anthropology was a global encounter, Zimmerman writes, and what results is a book about many things. Through the rise of anthropology Zimmerman analyzes topics as specific as the displays at Berlin's Royal Museum of Ethnology and as large as the growing national authority of natural science, the democratization of scientific knowledge, the cultural effects of colonialism, and the connections between imperialism and mass culture. In this book a rigorous examination of anthropology provides a prism for analyzing Germany's social and intellectual transformation in the years before 1914.

Anthropology's antihumanist worldview provides the study's overarching thesis. "While the discipline of

anthropology emerged all over Europe in the nineteenth century," Zimmerman writes, "it was above all in Germany that it functioned as a new antihumanist worldview, and it was in Germany that this anthropological antihumanism had some of its most important and far-reaching effects" (p. 1). The book's four sections detail the growing challenge to humanism posed by anthropology's radical empiricism. Zimmerman outlines anthropology's material beginnings in the commercial world of the *Voelkerschauen* and in the scientific discussions of local clubs. From there the analysis moves to an investigation of its intellectual foundations, its contributions to German national identity, its location in imperial frameworks (commercial, scientific and military) and its transformation at the turn of the twentieth century, when the static conception of "natural peoples," which had served as its foundation, gave way to Darwinian and historical perspectives.

Throughout Zimmerman provides a fresh look at science and society in Imperial Germany, displacing stereotypes about easy connections between anthropology, science and imperialism. His imaginative relocation of anthropology onto the terrain of Wilhelmine popular imperial culture is present from the beginning of the study. While highlighting the discipline's connections to German colonialism, Zimmerman points out that the "ma-

majority of encounters” between anthropologists and their subjects took place in Germany (p. 15). Moreover, these encounters often foundered on the discipline’s central paradox. Dependent on a static conception of “natural peoples,” anthropologists found themselves in dialogue with people who refused to divorce themselves from their history. Brought to Germany to display human nature in its most fundamental form, in reality the participants in the *Voelkerschauen* performed scripted roles (p. 23) and often resisted the desires of anthropologists to measure their skulls and bodies. While called in to sanction the scientific authenticity of the shows, anthropologists were “unable to wrest the individuals under consideration from history, even though the lack of history was supposed to be a defining characteristic of natural peoples” (p. 22). This tension between anthropology’s material location “in a global culture of imperialism and in the popular culture of exotic spectacles” (p. 15) and its intellectual foundation in a rigid conception of “natural peoples” runs throughout the study. Moreover, Zimmerman’s dual focus on anthropology as simultaneously a national discipline and a global encounter provides some of the study’s most interesting points.

From this beginning Zimmerman traces anthropology’s intellectual foundation and social location. He describes its development out of European philosophies of history that excluded non-Europeans as unworthy of study, valuable only in their capacity to yield information about mankind’s natural state. The other side of antihumanism was the callous treatment of the peoples under study, and Zimmerman’s text abounds with examples of the dehumanizing stance that anthropologists took toward their subjects. A conception of nature as a realm of static “types” (as derived from the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schelling), and of “natural peoples” existing outside of history, provided the basis of the discipline, he argues, making nineteenth-century German anthropologists into some of Darwin’s staunchest opponents. For German anthropologists each “type” in nature exhibited an unchanging essence, which was analyzable through empirical observation. As he shows, anthropology grew up in the interstices of medicine and philosophy; many of its early practitioners were medical doctors (p. 45), including early institutionalizers like Adolf Bastien and national figures such as Rudolf Virchow. It was late to professionalize and existed at one remove from the universities, finding a home in local museums and scientific expeditions that, as his examples show, were often sponsored by the military.

The study moves between intellectual and social his-

tory, and the specificities of the German variant of the discipline are drawn out in interesting ways. While the human and the natural were conjoined in narratives of creation in Britain and France, Zimmerman argues, in Germany an absolute barrier existed between the human and the natural, the main reason why Darwinism with its “monkey teachings” (*Affenlehre*) was anathema to German anthropologists. In Germany human deformities were discussed as individual pathologies, following the lead of the natural scientist and prominent anthropologist Rudolf Virchow, rather than as pieces of evidence in a Darwinian narrative connecting humanity to primate ancestors (pp. 62-85). This absolute barrier between the human and the natural provided a firm basis for anthropology’s challenge to humanism, argues Zimmerman, but it also made anthropology “radically unstable.” Perpetually interested in “freaks” (humans with tails, individuals suffering from hypertrichosis, giants and people with abnormally tiny skulls, to name a few), anthropologists had to keep these individuals radically separate from the “natural peoples” of the ethnographic exhibition. Human deformities were examples of individual pathologies, they believed, that were compelling for their entertainment value (Zimmerman’s text abounds with cold-blooded examples of anthropologists using individual human difference/deformity as forms of entertainment); “natural peoples,” in contrast, were evidence of particular human “types” that were valuable for the scientific study of humanity as a whole (pp. 73-85).

Stemming from their particular conception of nature, anthropologists established the authority of their discipline in several ways, all of them radically empirical. Zimmerman focuses on their interest in the measurement of skulls as central to the development of anthropological knowledge, and the importance of standardized forms of measurement and representation. The “Frankfurt Agreement” (1883) for cephalic measurement and the use of the “Lucaesian apparatus” for providing representations of skulls (a mode of representation based on geometric rather than linear perspective) cemented together the members of the new discipline and illustrated their radically antihumanist stance on “pure” scientific knowledge (pp. 86-107). Later chapters focus on anthropology’s institutional location in German colonial frameworks and the “colonial context of collecting” (including fascinating material on the position of anthropologists inside of Germany’s colonial wars). The book moves from topic to topic: the “total impression” meant to be imparted by an anthropological display, the role of grave-robbing in supplying anthropologists and museums with objects

and bodies, the proper way to scientifically photograph a nude body. All, claim Zimmerman, went to form anthropology's antihumanist worldview.

The study effectively destroys the "neutral" and "objective" claim of anthropology by placing it in numerous social and material contexts. We see how anthropologists attempted to construct the "primitive cultures" they claimed to study objectively, and how much effort was expended in creating an unbridgeable intellectual and social distance between the members of "native" cultures and the German scientists who pursued them. We also see how that boundary was threatened by the refusal of "natives" to perform as expected. The turn toward physical anthropology—to the measurement of skulls and bodies—argues Zimmerman, was a deliberate strategy to obtain "scientific" information from "natives" who refused to perform their proper roles as "natural peoples" (p. 34).

The book finds its center of gravity in its rigorous analysis of German anthropology's particular theories and practices, outlining its challenge to humanism and its place in a changing conception of national culture. On this note, Zimmerman's section on the project of the School Statistics sponsored by the German Anthropological Society in the 1870s (an effort to apply anthropology onto national terrain via a tabulation of the racial characteristics of German schoolchildren), is of particular interest as an early example to gather information "scientifically"

on the racial composition of the German population (pp. 135-146). Yet, the most exciting and surprising parts of this study are its global framework and the dynamic perspective it takes on setting an imperial context for the study of German national culture. The formation of ethnographic museums and exhibitions might have been driven by local interests (as H. Glenn Penny's recent book has shown), but here the project of anthropology has a nationalizing force and a location in a nascent global culture.[1] The two perspectives are not incompatible. The great virtue of this book is its questioning of the national framework that is so massively present in German history through its use of concepts of exchange, transfer, hybridity and network. Through Zimmerman's study we gain depth and detail on the topic of Germany as an imperial society if not an imperial power, and on anthropology's place in that development.

Note

[1]. H. Glenn Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

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