PREFACE

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Dividing the Spoils sets out critical issues that pertain to British military collecting of the non-European world. The genesis of this book lies in two exploratory research projects based at National Museums Scotland (NMS) undertaken between 2013 and 2015 with support from the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) and the British Academy (BA)/Leverhulme, and additional partnership funding from the National Army Museum (NAM). These adopted a two-pronged approach to address what the editors believe was the undervaluing of the histories, meanings and relevance of collections acquired by military organisations and personnel during active and garrison service in the British overseas empire, collections which continue to be housed in regimental, corps and service museums throughout the United Kingdom. The projects originated in a casual conversation between the editors, both at the time curators at NMS, about museum objects of mutual interest, but developed with the realisation that their respective roles and disciplinary specialisms within the same institution – one as an anthropologist and one as a military historian – led them to a range of objects with similar histories rooted in colonial warfare, which from each of their perspectives were only partially understood. From Allan's point of view, the academic anthropological community's disregard for the function of British organisational military culture in the acquisition of these artefacts has left them overlooked and misunderstood, coupled with the observation that in a post-colonial setting they have tended to become a source of unease for their military museum custodians. From Lidchi's point of view, there have been unanswered questions about the interpretations and intercultural relationships which underpinned the production and acquisition of the objects, questions which could be fruitfully explored with new museological and material culture theories. From both sides of the disciplinary divide, the analysis of material culture currently residing in regimental museums seemed to be disadvantageously stripped of cultural associations, which included most particularly those of military collecting culture itself. Conversely, however, military collections offer insight into military colonial encounters mediated through a different lens. Their role in bolstering *esprit de corps*, handed down through generations of military organisations, reveals practices of according values. This is a system which does not nullify other perceptions of value but one which is particular to itself and which is barely understood beyond the military world.

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Preliminary research indicated that several national surveys of non-European or ethnological collections in the UK had largely omitted those belonging to military museums. The workshops and collections research which followed, led by the editors, had as a key goal the fostering of an interdisciplinary and multi-perspectival dialogue between material anthropologists and military historians. *Dividing the Spoils* draws inspiration from the methodologies that emerged and employs source material from surveys of source collections that were undertaken during the two research projects.

Over the course of two years, a series of interdisciplinary workshops held under the project *Hidden in Plain Sight: Non-European Collections in Military Culture* (RSE) brought together senior academics, curators and early career researchers from the fields of military history and anthropology, including many of the contributors to his volume. The workshops discussed current research, the distinct character of military collecting, the question of looting and contemporary collecting practice in the present-day armed forces, as well as the distinctions, nuances and inconsistencies in definitions around terms such as trophies, souvenirs, plunder and loot. Preliminary research was undertaken in military museums with project researchers Desmond Thomas and Inbal Livne surveying several regimental museum collections, primarily those of the Scottish regiments and those now subsumed within the collections of the NAM.

Concurrently, the project *Material Encounters: Reassessing Military Collecting in North America and Tibet* (BA/Leverhulme) employed researcher Rosanna Nicolson to survey the collections of nine regimental museums with the aim of documenting links to two campaigns which bookended the period of rapid British imperial expansion: the Seven Years' War in North America (1754–63) and the Younghusband Mission to Tibet (1903–04).¹ The aim was to test a campaign-based research methodology which could draw out connections between objects distributed across the British Army's 130+ museums scattered around the UK. In addition, through the NAM's network of regimental and corps museum staff, several knowledge exchange workshops were organised to review the findings of the research projects with curators and public engagement staff working in regimental museums, allowing all those involved to better understand the potential for widening access to these collections.

Further research into the material culture of colonial conflict is currently being undertaken through a major research project, *Baggage and Belonging*, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AH/P006752/1). This ongoing project seeks to develop further the insights illuminated in this volume by considering in greater detail a range of

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colonial military campaigns from 1750 to 1900 in Africa and South Asia, based on a deeper engagement with the collecting cultures of the British Army and the Royal Navy and a fuller appreciation of the historical specificity of each encounter.

Dividing the Spoils deploys a historical and material culture-based methodology to place military collections in the context of military organisational culture, and to elucidate their meaning as material witnesses of encounters between non-European peoples and British imperial forces. This book argues for an understanding of these collections within a range of intercultural relationships which embrace diplomacy, alliance, curiosity and enquiry, as well as violence, appropriation and cultural hegemony. As a consequence of the different disciplines that inform the text, the vocabulary and terms vary across the chapters, with some contributions more indebted to historic terminology deriving from primary sources and the norms of military history. The Afterword charts the more recent and apparently seismic forces in the current debate about colonially derived collections and issues of restitution, claim and response. As a contribution to the continuing debate, this volume argues that military colonial collecting needs to be better understood. This avoids the essentialising of collecting down to a single action as the cumulative display of asymmetries of power between colonists and those being colonised, entirely relevant and uncomfortable though that imbalance may be, but rather also through analysing questions of military culture and material culture. Such approaches, we suggest, can be applied more widely, across the histories of former colonising powers, as an element of the ongoing reappraisal of colonial collecting among European museums.

Note

- 1 Material Encounters catalogue: <https://www.nms.ac.uk/collections-research/our-research/highlights-of-previous-projects/material-encounters/>