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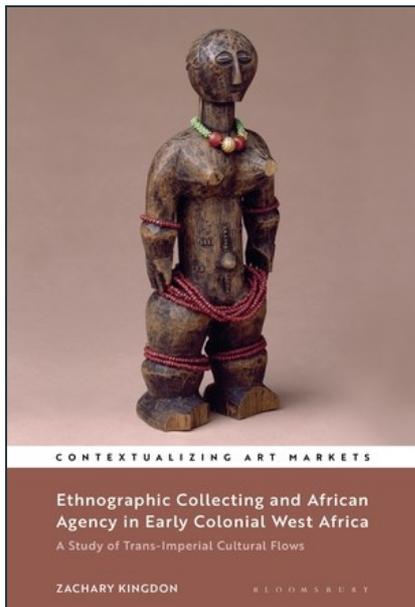
**Ethnographic Collecting and African Agency in Early Colonial West Africa**

A Study of Trans-Imperial Cultural Flows

**Zachary Kingdon**

A ground-breaking study of early collections from Africa in museums in northwest England, with a focus on the agendas of West Africans who helped to create them.

"Zachary Kingdon's new book is a masterful exploration of the intricate maze of relations between African and European donors, collectors, explorers, traders, collaborators, intermediaries, entrepreneurs, friends and relatives that produced the African collections of Liverpool's World Museum in the early colonial period. This book is a magnificent work of scholarship and creativity. With impressive command of highly original sources, which include hitherto unused Museum accession records, Kingdon breaks with the culturalist essentialisations that reduce African history to a tale of unnamed powerless 'Africans' dominated by European imperialists. While never losing sight of how power inequalities influenced interactions and negotiations, Kingdon's book is a history of named individuals whose characters and strategies are reconstructed in their full complexity and, at times, ambiguity. Lucidly written and engaging, *Ethnographic Collecting and African Agency in Early Colonial West Africa* is not only a major contribution to historical knowledge, but also an absolute pleasure to read." – **Benedetta Rossi, Reader in African Studies, University of Birmingham, UK**



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The early collections from Africa in Liverpool's World Museum reflect the city's longstanding shipping and commercial links with Africa's Atlantic coast. A principal component of these collections is an assemblage of several thousand artefacts from western Africa that were transported to institutions in northwest England between 1894 and 1916 by the Liverpool steam ship engineer Arnold Ridyard. While Ridyard's collecting efforts can be seen to have been shaped by the steamers' dynamic capacity to connect widely separated people and places, his Methodist credentials were fundamental in determining the profile of his African networks, because they meant that he was not part of official colonial authority in West Africa. Kingdon's study uncovers the identities of many of Ridyard's numerous West African collaborators and discusses their interests and predicaments under the colonial dispensation. Against this background account, their agendas are examined with reference to surviving narratives that accompanied their donations and within the context of broader processes of trans-imperial exchange, through which they forged new identities and statuses for themselves and attempted to counter expressions of British cultural imperialism in the region. The study concludes with a discussion of the competing meanings assigned to the Ridyard assemblage by the Liverpool Museum and examines the ways in which its re-contextualization in museum contexts helped to efface signs of the energies and narratives behind its creation.

Zachary Kingdon is Curator of African Collections at National Museums Liverpool, UK.



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