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## Early history of ethnography and ethnology in the German enlightenment : anthropological discourse in Europe and Asia, 1710-1808

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## History of Anthropology



**Early History of Ethnography and Ethnology  
in the German Enlightenment:  
Anthropological Discourse in Europe and Asia, 1710-1808**

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Aan mijn ouders

To my teachers

Für Anett und Erato

Ethnography is ... the Anthropologist's Muse  
(Ioan M. Lewis 1973)

L'anthropologue est l'astronome des sciences sociales  
(Claude Lévi-Strauss 1954)

Die Wahrheit ist das Kind der Zeit, nicht der Autorität  
(Bertolt Brecht 1938)



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## Preface

The present book reports on research on the early history of anthropology in Europe, Asia, and North America conducted over the past twenty years. In April 1988, I completed a lengthy manuscript on ‘The Emergence of Ethnology in Göttingen, c.1770,’ which the Department of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Leiden accepted as a M.A. thesis (Vermeulen 1988). In this thesis, written in Dutch, I argued that ethnology had originated in eighteenth-century Germany when two professors of history at the University of Göttingen, August Ludwig Schlözer and Johann Christoph Gatterer introduced two concepts for that study, *Völkerkunde* and *Ethnographie*. According to the information then available, it was in their work (published between 1771 and 1778) that these concepts, together with variants such as *ethnographisch* (ethnographic) and *Ethnograph* (ethnographer), first surfaced as the names of a new academic discipline. In the years 1991-95, thanks to a doctoral fellowship from the Centre of Non-Western Studies in Leiden (later Research School CNWS), I had the opportunity to check these data in the university library of Göttingen and in other libraries, museums, and research institutes in Germany, Scotland, England, Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Russia. In the course of my investigations, I found much evidence supporting these suppositions and came to the conclusion that there had indeed been a fruitful period in the final quarter of the eighteenth century during which ethnography and ethnology could be said to have come into existence. The astonishing fact was not that this material was unfamiliar to contemporary scholars but, rather, that the post-World War II secondary literature had not or not sufficiently acknowledged it. However, after attending a conference at Halle, Central Germany, in 1996, I became aware that these events had been preceded by an earlier stage, during which ethnography might be said to have originated in the field. After studying the relevant material, I concluded that both periods are part of a process of conceptualization beginning in the early eighteenth century. Thus, ethnography originated in the field, was subsequently introduced as ethnology (*Völkerkunde*) in scholarly discourse at the University of Göttingen, and then exported abroad.

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