

***In the Museum of Man: Race, Anthropology and Empire in France, 1850-1950.*
Alice L. Conklin. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013. 392 pp.***

Reviewed by John Warne Monroe

Despite the widely acknowledged importance of such figures as Marcel Mauss, Marcel Griaule, Michel Leiris, and Claude Lévi-Strauss, French cultural anthropology has had to wait a long time for its historian. Until the appearance of this meticulously-researched and lucid book, English-speaking scholars interested in the development of what the French call *ethnologie* from the late 19th century to the Second World War had to content themselves with Robert Parkin's contribution to the edited volume *One Discipline Four Ways* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), and the suggestive but brief accounts James Clifford presented in his famous essays of the 1980s. While francophone readers have had more options—notably the work of Nélia Dias and Jean Jamin—the literature in French has tended to be primarily concerned with tightly focused institutional histories and individual biographies.

Conklin's work, in contrast, presents an innovative account of the development of the field as a whole by blending together these usually distinct institutional and biographical approaches. In some ways, her book is a straightforward institutional history, charting the rise and fall of journals, professional associations, institutes and museums; in others, it is a collective intellectual biography—what she calls a “multigenerational group portrait” (16)—in which academic institutions become contexts that both shape and are shaped by the ideas and interactions of the scholars who constitute them.

Conklin presents her material in seven chapters, framed by an introduction and an epilogue. Chapter one focuses on the late 19th century, when two contrasting but linked approaches to the study of human difference emerged: physical anthropology, a field defined in France by the legacy of Paul Broca and preoccupied with the anthropometric study of race; and ethnography, an approach focused on the observation and description of so-called “primitive” peoples. The latter, Conklin shows, was very much a poor stepchild in the 19th century. It was not until the beginning of the 20th, in the new political context created by the consolidation of French imperial power, that the value of ethnography began to be perceived more clearly. Chapter two provides the most comprehensive account to date of the events leading up to the establishment of the *Institut d'Ethnologie* at the Sorbonne in 1925, which marked cultural anthropology's arrival as a university discipline in France. Chapters three, four, and five are thematic investigations of three facets of the nascent discipline's development in the 1930s: the role of the ethnographic museum, the continuing importance of what Conklin describes as “race science,” and the complex connections between *ethnologie* and the colonial enterprise. In chapter six, Conklin turns her attention to the importance of pedagogy to the discipline's growth, tracing the influence of Marcel Mauss' famous course on ethnographic method. The crucial legacy of this course, she argues, was the distinctively generous form of humanism it fostered among students—one that created “a space to promote and practice new ideas of tolerance, reciprocity, and cross-cultural empathy in an age of extremes” (239). While the fieldwork that made the intellectual elaboration

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of this new understanding possible depended on the material support of the French colonial state, Conklin observes, the empathy Mauss encouraged his students to cultivate led them to question France's imperial designs in new ways. The seventh chapter follows these students into the crucible of the Second World War, during which many Mauss-trained ethnologists became heroic participants in the Resistance; it also explores the legacy of those who chose to collaborate. In the epilogue, Conklin shows how Mauss' example, as carried forward by his students Alfred Métraux and Michel Leiris, helped shape a new kind of anti-racism.

The canvas of the "group portrait" that Conklin paints in this book is vast—the footnotes and bibliography are staggering in their detail and comprehensiveness—but it centers on three key figures: the anthropologist and institution-builder Paul Rivet, Mauss, and the physical anthropologist and fanatical anti-Semite, George Montandon. While Rivet and Mauss are familiar names to anyone who knows something about the history of French *ethnologie*, Montandon is a much more surprising choice. During the Vichy period, he was one of France's most odious collaborators, and the tendency has been to dismiss him as a marginal crackpot. For Conklin, however, Montandon's story serves as a useful corrective to excessive presentism. While he was—thankfully—on the losing side of history, he was an active and respected participant in interwar French scholarly debates about the nature and meaning of human difference. The fact that there was a place for Montandon in the professional world of anthropology between the wars, Conklin argues, is an important part of the story, one that demonstrates just how high the political stakes were for practitioners of this new social science in the years leading up to the Second World War. As she shows, the ultimate triumph of a conception of human difference that strove to reject evolutionary and racial hierarchies was by no means a foregone conclusion—and indeed, remains a work in progress today.

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