

H-France Review Vol. 17 (January 2017), No. 23

Claude Blanckaert, ed., *Le Musée de l'homme, histoire d'un musée laboratoire*. Paris: Editions Artlys/Muséum National d'Histoire naturelle, 2015. 288 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. 39€ (pb). ISBN 978-2-85495-612-2.

Review by John Warne Monroe, Iowa State University.

The last twenty years have been tumultuous ones for French public museums. The upheaval began in 1996, when, at President Jacques Chirac's instigation, a special commission was formed to begin negotiating the terms on which a select group of African, Oceanic and Native American objects would be "admitted" to the Louvre. This initial move began a far-reaching process of transformation that remade the French museum landscape in an effort to come to terms with the complex legacies of empire, as manifested either in the metropolitan presence of exotic objects or in the social reality of immigration. There were four notable births: a gallery of so-called *arts premiers* in the Louvre in 2000; a museum devoted to the same material on the Quai Branly in 2006; a museum of Immigration at the Palais de la Porte Dorée in 2007; and a Musée des Civilisations d'Europe et de la Méditerranée in Marseille six years later. There was also a somewhat less spectacular death: the Musée des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie, which ceded its entire collection to the Quai Branly and Louvre. Finally, and most contentiously, there was a dismemberment. The Musée de l'Homme was drawn and quartered: its vast ethnographic collection went to the Quai Branly and Louvre, and its collection of European folk material went to Marseille. It took nearly a decade for the torso that remained on the colline de Chaillot to recover. Aside from a few notable prehistoric artifacts and anthropological specimens—the mammoth-ivory Venus of Lespugue, Descartes's skull—the Musée de l'Homme had lost the objects that had previously defined its institutional identity. The fascinating ambivalences, hopes, aporias and repressions involved in this transformation have already inspired a number of excellent books, including signal contributions by Robert Aldritch, Herman Lebovics, Benoît de l'Estoile, Sally Price, and Daniel J. Sherman.[1]

The copiously-illustrated edited volume under consideration here, published in 2015 on the occasion of the Musée de l'Homme's re-opening after an ambitious refurbishment, marks that institution's effort both to take stock of its past and to chart a new path forward after a very bad twenty years. Psychologists often recommend using narrative as a means of coming to terms with trauma, and that seems to be just what the editor, the historian Claude Blanckaert, has set out to do here. His ambition is to provide a vision of the institution's past that makes it possible to imagine its current state as a healthy continuation of certain noble ideals present at its very founding, while nevertheless facing the fact of its implication in the colonial project. As Blanckaert puts it, quoting the ethnographer Serge Tornay, "un musée de l'Homme repensé, réinventé, 'doit prendre son propre passé comme matériau d'étude' et se poster en 'observatoire critique des idées dites scientifiques, y compris celles qu'il a contribué à forger et à divulguer'" (p. 15). Does this volume achieve that difficult but important goal? Yes and no, for reasons I will explain in more detail after addressing the content of the essays it includes.

In historical terms, the museum's noble legacy lies reassuringly close to the surface. The Musée de l'Homme, which opened its doors in 1938 but was first conceived in 1936 as an ambitious expansion of the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro, represented the highest aspirations of the Popular Front. Paul Rivet, the museum's first director and guiding light, envisioned it as a bulwark against Fascist racism. The Musée de l'Homme's galleries, while they were products of their time and thus placed various ethnic groups at different points on an evolutionary scale presumed to culminate in Western modernity, nevertheless emphasized the universal characteristics that bound all human beings together. The goal was to promote empathy and respect for difference in a geopolitical climate in which powerful forces sought to eradicate both. When the war came to France, a few key employees of the museum acted with extraordinary courage in defense of these ideals, forming one of the very first resistance groups in the Occupied Zone. Several of them paid with their lives.

Blanckaert's edited volume takes this legacy as its point of departure, though its contributors also look unsparingly at several of the various post-war developments that undercut Rivet's aspirations, transforming the museum from a poster-child for progressive museology into an embarrassingly dated, increasingly irrelevant throwback. Blanckaert divides the book into three sections. The first investigates the founding of the Musée de l'Homme, its relation to the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro, and the connection of the museum to the resistance. It features contributions by Alice L. Conklin and Christine Laurière, both eminent scholars of the museum's institutional and intellectual history, and Julien Blanc, a historian of the French Resistance, who provides a brief account of the activities of the intrepid group that came to be known as the "Réseau du Musée de l'Homme."

The most striking aspect of this first section, much of which recapitulates material already familiar from the authors' previous publications, is a difference in opinion between Conklin and Laurière. Where Conklin, following the line she takes in her magisterial monograph, emphasizes the continuity between the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro of the early 1930s and the Musée de l'Homme, Laurière emphasizes their difference.^[2] The key factor distinguishing the Musée de l'Homme from its predecessor was its inclusion of prehistoric artifacts and physical anthropology specimens. Rivet, who himself had experience as both a physical anthropologist and an ethnographer, saw these elements as additions crucial to his conception of "ethnology"—a discipline he named, and envisioned as a comprehensive science of man encompassing both physiology and culture. For Conklin, the fact that the new museum added a few physical anthropology galleries and augmented its ethnographic displays with illustrative skulls was a comparatively minor alteration. After all, Rivet was in charge of both institutions, and his assistant director, Georges Henri Rivière, set the museological tone for each with his trademark metallic vitrines, relentless avoidance of anything that might smack of the "diorama," and copious use of didactic material in the form of text and photographs. In the previous museum, Rivet and Rivière had also established the notion of the "Museum-Laboratory"—the idea of the museum as a site of serious behind-the-scenes research—that would shape the institutional structure of the Musée de l'Homme. Laurière, in contrast, declares that "il faut faire un sort à cette idée d'une continuité entre le Trocadéro de 1928-1935 et le musée de l'Homme—le second n'est pas l'héritier du premier" (p. 53). The empirical evidence for this assertion of what Laurière calls "rupture," given all the signs of continuity Conklin has so convincingly noted, is not as strong as it could be (p. 48). It is undeniable, however, that the continuing survival of the Musée de l'Homme—a museum deprived of the collections that once filled 80 percent of its gallery space—as an institution capable of supporting current research depends on its capacity to redefine its identity around the material that remains in its reserves. The political value, in this context, of re-narrating the museum's history in a way that gives anthropological specimens and prehistoric artifacts a determinant role in its institutional mission is quite clear, even if the evidentiary basis for the new story is tenuous.

The five essays in the second section of the volume, titled "la science en théorie et en pratique," take this process of re-narration further. They include four longer essays by Blanckaert, Arnaud Hurel, Serge Bahuchet and Brice Gérard, and one shorter text by Wolf Feuerhahn. Blanckaert, Bahuchet and

Feuerhahn seek to update Rivet's dream of a comprehensive, interdisciplinary science of man by retelling the history of the Musée de l'Homme in a way that downplays the role of ethnography and emphasizes physical anthropology. For all three writers, Rivet's vision of universal humanity, which at first glance seems rather dated in its racialism and privileging of Western modernity, has the potential to lead to a museum focused on "une troisième voie par-delà nature et culture" (p. 98)—one in which a new sort of universality can be figured through presentations of the ways human beings have interacted, and continue to interact, with their environment. Hurel's essay is a more matter-of-fact account of the role the study of prehistory played in the Musée de l'Homme from its foundation in 1936 to the present, with some very useful information both on the leading prehistorians employed there and on the formation of the museum's collections. Gérard does something similar with ethnomusicology, describing the influential ideas of André Schaeffner, and in the process explaining the museum's historical tendency—somewhat perplexing to a non-initiate—to isolate musical instruments from the cultures in which they function, and instead to classify them by form of sound production (a drum, for instance, whether *tar*, *tabla* or *tympani*, was first and foremost a "membranophone"). As Gérard makes clear, this approach helped convey Rivet's vision of human unity-in-diversity.

The third section, "faire voir, faire savoir," turns the focus to the building itself. The first essay, by the architectural historian Philippe Rivoirard, describes the construction of the old Palais du Trocadéro in 1878, its subsequent life, and its transformation into the Palais de Chaillot, now an icon of Art Deco architecture, as part of the 1937 world's fair. Fabrice Grognet, author of a thesis on the Musée de l'Homme, provides a history of the content and layout of its galleries between 1938 and 2009. The story he tells is one of curatorial dynamism—a steady production of ambitious plans for redoing galleries—transformed into institutional stagnation by a chronic lack of funds. Grognet's account makes it clear just how crippling the museum's unusual bureaucratic position was: as a dependency of the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, and hence of the Ministry of Education instead of the Ministry of Culture, the Musée de l'Homme was always a poor stepchild, deprived of resources that instead went to fund scientific initiatives that the professors at the Muséum considered more up to date. Christelle Patin's essay describes the museum's various attempts to reach out to a larger public, beginning in the late 1930s with efforts to attract working-class visitors, and continuing after the war with a series of highly publicized exhibitions presenting select objects from the ethnographic collections as masterpieces of world art. She concludes with an account of the various temporary exhibitions the museum undertook to draw more visitors in the period from the late 1970s to the early 2000s.

Benoît de L'Estoile, in an essay that functions as a kind of summing up, takes a more synthetic view, situating the Musée de l'Homme's gradual slide from "pionnier muséographique" to "conservatoire de modes d'exposition devenus obsolètes" in a framework of broader disciplinary shifts, especially the move toward greater specialization (p. 248). This created a new element of rivalry in the institution, pitting physical anthropologists and prehistorians against ethnologists, for example, and thereby undermining the sense of common cause that both Conklin and Laurière have singled out as essential to the museum's early success. For L'Estoile, a central characteristic of the Musée de l'Homme is its "utopian" spirit, which he defines as an "orientation vers un futur imaginé en fonction d'un idéal de modernité et de progrès scientifique" (p. 241). Utopianism, L'Estoile suggests, might be the place to find continuity in the museum's history. Seen from this point of view, the removal of the museum's ethnographic collections could be considered a boon, since it liberated the institution "des préoccupations artistiques, d'héritages coloniaux devenus encombrants, ou des revendications patrimoniales de restitution" (p. 252). This deliverance, however, as L'Estoile sees it, should not be considered a free pass to construct a new fantasy of unproblematic human universality: "le drame de l'humanisme moderne," he writes, "est que, en tant qu'héritier des Lumières et ancré dans la tradition hellénique, judaïque et chrétienne, il se veut universaliste, sans être pour autant universellement partagé" (p. 257). Resolving that paradox, or at least developing some way of holding it in productive tension, L'Estoile concludes, will be the new museum's defining challenge. The final essay, a brief postface by Cécile Aaufaure and Évelyne Heyer, the lead curators at the new Musée de l'Homme, makes it clear how the institution intends to address the

problem L'Estoile identifies: by seeking first to demonstrate “l'universalité de l'humain mais aussi sa singularité selon les cultures” in a manner that promotes “une lecture humaniste de nos différences;” and second, to engage in a “remise en question de la position de l'homme par rapport à la nature” (p. 261). Museologically, they propose to realize this vision by acknowledging that “l'objet n'est plus le support principal de la connaissance de l'homme.” Their museum will privilege *médiation*—frequent recourse to “une constellation de supports, parmi lesquels les outils numériques” (p. 261).

This effort to grapple with the implications of a humanism that presents itself as universalistic is laudable, especially in France, where claims of universalism can sometimes serve—at least to a historian's jaundiced eye—as cover for intolerance and xenophobia. At the same time, however, I do have to wonder whether this volume, worthy as its scholarly contributions are, fully accomplishes Blanckaert's stated goal of envisioning a museum that approaches its own past as a subject for critical examination. Blanckaert writes that the chapters he has gathered together question “la fonction-musée dans ses lignes de force, de tension et d'inertie” (p. 16). This project, he continues, requires a turn away from a previous approach that characterized the historical work on the Musée de l'Homme in the 1980s. He cites no specific texts, but states that the offending scholarship was marred by “une logique commémorative ponctuée de temps forts,” such as “l'initiative des milieux d'avant-garde” and “la célèbre mission Dakar-Djibouti de 1931-1933” (p. 16). For those who know the literature well, these allusions point fairly clearly to Jean Jamin, author of a series of now-classic essays on the history of French ethnology in the interwar period—though Jamin's unflinching attention to the power dynamics inherent in the “colonial situation” belies this implicit characterization of his work as somehow hagiographic.^[3] Of course, since Jamin is not mentioned by name, my identification of him as Blanckaert's critical foil must remain a mere hypothesis. It is, however, quite surprising to note Jamin's absence from the list of contributors to this volume, which otherwise includes the most eminent historians of the Musée de l'Homme. A few of Jamin's essays are listed in the bibliography, but it would perhaps have been useful to have included a reprint of one, since several are still not readily available outside research libraries.^[4]

Doing so would have been a way to fill what to my mind is a crucial lacuna in the volume as it stands: its failure to undertake a sustained investigation of the circumstances under which the museum acquired so many of its objects. Yes, Conklin's article discusses Rivet's policy of sending object-gathering “missions” into the colonies, and L'Estoile mentions Rivet's willingness to support the French colonial project, especially in the “humanist” form it assumed between the wars, but there is no essay that directly addresses either the museum's effort to place itself at the center of an empire-wide institutional network, or the specific means it used to acquire objects in the colonies. Rivet, for example, enthusiastically supported the creation of the Dakar-based Institut Français d'Afrique Noire (IFAN) in the late 1930s; the institution that IFAN grew into during the war was profoundly influenced by his “museum-laboratory” model. The Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro and Musée de l'Homme also funded and coordinated a steady stream of colonial collecting expeditions. The “célèbre mission Dakar-Djibouti” was in fact only the first of many.

As the timeline at the back of this edited volume briefly notes, the Musée d'Ethnographie organized no fewer than *twenty-five* such expeditions to France's African colonies between 1931 and 1935, all of which engaged in vigorous programs of object acquisition (appendix, n.p.). While my own archival research indicates that this “collecting” generally involved cash payment for goods received, reading against the grain one can also plausibly hazard that colonial power dynamics added an element of implicit coercion to such transactions. The striking descriptions of just this kind of coercion that Michel Leiris provides in *L'Afrique Fantôme*, his journal of the Dakar-Djibouti expedition, are anecdotal evidence in support of such a conclusion. While it is true that the ethnographic material has now been removed from the Musée de l'Homme, its absence—as L'Estoile notes—does not absolve the institution. Significant portions of its collections of prehistoric artifacts and human remains also derive from imperial adventures of one kind or another, and hence raise questions of their own. L'Estoile mentions two notable examples: the remains of Saartjie Baartman, once called the “Hottentot Venus,” and the skull of

the Kanak chief Ataï. In both cases, the remains were returned—but of course there are many more potential claims that could be made. In the face of silences of this type, one is tempted to evoke Renan's famous observation on nationalism: *pour devenir un musée, il faut (quand même) oublier beaucoup de choses*.

NOTES

[1] Robert Aldritch, *Vestiges of the Colonial Empire in France: Monuments, Museums and Colonial Memories* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Herman Lebovics, *Bringing the Empire Back Home: France in the Global Age* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004); Benoît de l'Estoile, *Le goût des Autres: de l'exposition coloniale aux arts premiers* (Paris: Flammarion, 2007); Sally Price, *Paris Primitive: Jacques Chirac's Museum on the Quai Branly* (Chicago, Il.: University of Chicago Press, 2007); and Daniel J. Sherman, *French Primitivism and the Ends of Empire, 1945-1975* (Chicago, Il.: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

[2] See Alice L. Conklin, *In the Museum of Man: Race, Anthropology and Empire in France, 1850-1950* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2013).

[3] Four of Jamin's essays on the mission Dakar-Djibouti, written in 1982, 1984, 1986, and 1996, have been republished as a freely-available e-book: Jean Jamin, *Le Cerceuil de Queequeg: Mission Dakar-Djibouti, mai 1931-février 1933* (Paris: Encyclopédie en ligne Béroserose, 2014), http://www.berose.fr/IMG/pdf/jj_6-09web.pdf.

[4] Two essays that would be logical choices are Jean Jamin, "Les objets ethnographiques sont-ils des choses perdues?" in Jacques Hainard and Roland Kaehr, eds., *Temps perdu, temps retrouvé: Voir les choses passées au présent* (Neuchâtel: Musée d'Ethnographie, 1985), pp. 51-74; and "Faut-il brûler les musées d'ethnographie?" in *Gradhiva* 24(1988):65-69.

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ISSN 1553-9172