

Big Man by his constituency, and spends some time repeating the details of the gossip that arose at that time. He posits that although Kaputin had been referred to as a Big Shot previously, it was its universal acknowledgement that led to his defeat. Without disputing such a causal link, of the type Martin criticizes in traditional Melanesian ethnography, it may be that the willingness of all to openly criticize this politician of thirty years was more a recognition of his loss of power rather than a cause of it.

More generally, ambiguity underlies key points in the structure of this ethnography. First of all it is not clear, whether it is an ethnography of Matupit and the new resettlement site, or of the Tolai in general. This may appear a fine distinction but it is within the confines of a historically comparative village study that Martin is at his best. In his discussion of the Big Man / Big Shot he casts about more broadly and reveals a lack of comprehension of both the uniqueness of the subject of his study and the appropriate methods for its study. Several times, Martin commences an account of his actions with the phrase, "Like a good Melanesian ethnographer ...". This is an ironic usage and it is not clear what he is signalling to the reader. Reference and comparison of his observations to the work of Bruce Knauft among the Gebusi and Joel Robbins among the Urapmin suggests that he sees a similarity between what he is doing and research among very small, relatively isolated communities. Although in the introduction he recognizes the fact that the Tolai are an exceptional case and have a very long history of six or seven generations of integration into global cultural and economic forms, he does not seem to grasp that this very history places him as an ethnographer differently in relation to the subject of study and provides new and different opportunities to study *kastom* and individuation. Far from accepting the author's contention that in the early 21st century the Tolai big man is dead, I would suggest that evidence of him needs to be recovered from other venues around the Gazelle and the country and may indeed be found in a variety of easily accessible texts including that of the nation's newspapers. Many Tolai do not live in villages, nor in East New Britain, nor in Papua New Guinea for that matter. What I find disappointing in this ethnography is that there is no new insight provided into this Tolai exceptionality.

Secondly, Martin struggles to establish clarity about the value of the sign and its referent in his own research. He insists initially that Volosinov's theory allows him to focus exclusively on the contextual usage of the sign and ignore the referent. But then, as he develops his approach to the Big Man / Big Shot duality, he resorts to Volosinov as a justification for an assumption of ontological change in the referent. In some ways his usage of local rhetoric in the form of the "grass roots" and the "Big Shot" approximates a class analysis, at least in the sense of those who can afford to indulge possessive individualism and those who can not. But this simplistic folk classification, although not without explanatory power, seems inadequate to the anthropological analysis of data. At Sikut apparently some people were still living at the reception center and could not afford to even start building a house, others were

actively involved in building but over the long term, some were unemployed, while others worked for wages and so on. It is not clear whether there are Big Shots represented here. The economic data that Martin claims to have collected in household surveys of both Matupit and Sikut could possibly provide a clarification of socioeconomic class. It is ironic that an ethnography that draws on the work of Marx and Engels, a Marxist inspired linguist and invokes the ethnographic tradition of A. L. Epstein and Max Gluckman provides not a single evocation of the concept of class.

Marta Rohatynskyj

**Martin, Luther H., and Jesper Sørensen** (eds.): *Past Minds. Studies in Cognitive Historiography*. London: Equinox Publishing, 2011. 206 pp. ISBN 978-1-84555-741-8. Price: £ 19.99

The last two decades of historical writing has shown that while no new "turn" has captured the imagination of the discipline, there are several identifiable trends that indicate that the extreme cognitive relativism associated with postmodernist linguistic and cultural theory has lost its momentum. Rather than bemoaning the very possibility of historical knowledge, even as some of the insights afforded by the linguistic turn were adopted in an amended fashion, historical writing continues as it always has, based on evidence from a past regarded as real, even as interpretations of this past have changed over time. In short, the postmodernist claim that history is nothing more than a form of literary fiction has had little impact on actual historical writing. Further, recent trends show that the postmodernist decentering of science, and the critique of its objectivity as a discipline, based on erroneous expectations of what science is about, has lost much of its steam. On the contrary, there appears to be, in the last decade, a return to the interdisciplinarity reminiscent of the "social science" orientation of the 1970s and 1980s, when history was regarded as a science, albeit a social one, and when intensive engagement with the neighbouring disciplines of sociology, economics, psychology, and geography had made for a more comprehensive and contextual study of the past. Today we have an effort to understand the past and the mental practices of historic agents through insights afforded by the cognitive sciences, including cognitive psychology, cognitive anthropology, cognitive sociology, evolutionary biology, and neuroscience. The founding of the *Journal of Cognitive Historiography* in 2013 is a testament to this radically new and exciting social science history, one that hopes to bridge the divide between the scientific and the humanistic disciplines in complementary ways.

This is the subject of "Past Minds," a collection of essays based on a conference held in 2007 at the Institute of Cognition and Culture in Queen's University Belfast, Belfast. The book is divided into four parts, of which the first and last discuss the relationship between historical writing and evolutionary and cognitive theory. The second and third parts contain articles that exploit insights from the cognitive sciences and evolutionary biology to throw light on aspects of past culture and history. The ma-

jority of the thirteen authors of this volume are scholars of religion, one a professor of cognitive science with an interest in cultural evolution and behavioral economics, and another a cultural anthropologist by training. One of the editors, Luther H. Martin, is well known for his cognitive work on the religions of the Graeco-Roman world.

In answer to the question, as to why historians should concern themselves with cognitive science and evolutionary modeling, Martin tells us that if historians are going to make assumptions about causality, then they must be able to identify the mechanisms of this causal process, about which the evolved features of human cognition can tell us much. Martin adds that in doing so historians also help solve problems in cognitive science.

Can cognitive science in fact complement historical analysis? Several of the articles seem to suggest that precise, rigorous analyses using cognitive theories can indeed cut through often mistaken common sense assumptions about past events. Thus, Anders Lisdorf's study of Roman omens and prodigies (omens directed at the state, and crucial in determining state policy) inquires into why certain events qualified as omens and others did not. Previous theories explained and assumed that public crises and fear prompted an increase in reports of prodigies which were accepted as such by the Roman Senate, whose job it was to accept or reject events of an unusual nature as omens. But as there is no available evidence on the interpretation procedures of the Senate on omens and prodigies, Lisdorf turns to other methods of analysis. A linear regression establishing a causal link between crises of varying degrees to the number of prodigies circulating shows that there is no significant relationship between the two. Therefore the fear thesis is not consistent with the findings. How, then, to establish the frequency of circulation and acceptance? Here cognitive models of micro-narratives, such as the urban myth model, based on counter-intuitive elements, may offer an explanation for the reporting and circulation of prodigies, while acceptance can be understood in terms of cognitive models of communication. For the latter, Lisdorf is able to demonstrate a logarithmic function that shows a valid connection between acceptance of a prodigy and its physical proximity to Rome. While accepting that this may not be a complete explanation, and that the distribution does not explain the rejections, Lisdorf offers us a more robust causality with the least number of exceptions. Similarly, Gabriel Levy in his discussion of Jewish niche construction uses concepts from evolutionary biology to explain Ashkenazi intelligence in certain types of reasoning. Levy does not eschew the importance of historical factors, such as emancipation of Jews in the 19th century, in the question of Jewish intelligence, but seeks, as he states, "for a suitable way to integrate the insights from cognitive science and evolutionary theory into the study of Judaism that does justice to both biological nature and the irreducible contingency of history" (31).

The articles in this volume offer welcome examples of rigorous analysis aimed at solving middle-level questions regarding past human behavior without recourse to speculative musings. They show us that common sense assump-

tions do not always bear the facts. Nor are the analyses conducted reductively. Behavioral responses are not reduced to brain physiology. Cognitive structures are recognized as deep structures that constrain expression and behavior in certain ways, but culture is also seen, corresponding to recent findings on neuroplasticity, as having an impact on the evolutionary process, and cultural evolution as a part of biological evolution itself. The articles point, therefore, to the larger questions of the human experience, the Big Picture, even as they examine the minutia of cultural phenomena. Such inquiries enrich our perspective of the past and remind us of what it is to be, beyond our cultural affiliations, human.

Supriya Mukherjee

**Massicard, Elise:** *The Alevis in Turkey and Europe. Identity and Managing Territorial Diversity.* Abingdon: Routledge, 2013. 255 pp. ISBN 978-0-415-66796-8. Price: £ 85.00

On September 8th of 2013, ground was broken on an unprecedented, indeed groundbreaking, structure and project in Turkey. In the Ankara district of Mamlak, construction began on the first combined mosque-*cem* house (*cemevi*) in Turkey. Several prominent national newspapers covered the groundbreaking the following day; above all, the newspapers' reportage focused on the opinions and public reactions of prominent Alevis. Turkey's Alevis are a loosely-knit cultural-religious community who have struggled to define themselves against both hegemonic Turkish Sunni Islam and the refusal of the Turkish state to recognize them as a minority; while Alevi theology derives in part from Shi'a Islam, emphasizing reverence for such figures Ali and Hussein, their distinctive ritual practice is the *cem*, a terpsichorean performance known as a *semah*, in which participants, both men and women, circumambulate to the accompaniment of ballads played on lutes (*saz*). In spite of the ostensible good will behind the integrated mosque-*cem* house project, Alevi public figures voiced a variety of strong responses, both pro and con. While several Alevi activists and *dedes* (members of a sacral Alevi ritual lineage) praised the construction as a gesture of conciliation between Alevis and Sunnis, others condemned the project as "assimilationist" (*asimilasyoncu*), emphasizing in particular their skepticism over the support provided by the controversial Sunni Turkish theologian Fethullah Gülen. Moreover, a small, intermittently violent protest occurred near the construction site on the day of the groundbreaking. By chance, I was in Istanbul at the time, and was able to discuss the mosque-*cem* house initiative with a variety of friends and research contacts, both Alevi and Sunni. Inevitably, I encountered a wide spectrum of reactions, ranging from staunch enthusiasm to cynical dismissal.

How might we comprehend the exceptional politicization of and debate over the mosque-*cem* house initiative, which has been couched by its supporters in the comfortable liberal terms of religious choice and interreligious tolerance? Any interpretation of the current politicization of this project in Turkey demands a broader perspective