

# Emmanuel de Martonne

Emmanuel de Martonne (Chabris 1873 - Sceaux 1955) is one of the dominant figures in French geography in the first half of the 20th century. He was a disciple of P. Vidal de la Blache, and is known in France as the founder of general physical geography, and more specifically as a specialist in geomorphology. In the course of a career lasting nearly 50 years, he had a profound influence on academic geography by way of his teaching, his role in national and international university institutions (including the International Geographical Union), and also the wide corpus of his scientific works. After being appointed to Rennes (1899-1905) and Lyon (1905-1909), De Martonne was appointed to the chair of Geography in Faculty of Letters in Paris, after the departure of Vidal de la Blache. There he trained several generations of students, giving considerable importance to field visits and cartography, as well as to map commentaries or the representation of volumes of relief using block diagrams. De Martonne contributed to consolidating the institutional positioning of geography in the university, in line with the earlier orientations of Vidal de la Blache. He aimed to lay the foundations for a general physical geography by merging hitherto distinct disciplines (cartography, morphology, climatology, botany and zoology). From an institutional point of view, this combined entity was established, in a rather paradoxical manner, within the Faculty of Letters, while the disciplines belonged to the Faculty of Science. He thus established French physical geography in the literary university environment. A. Cholley (1955) has underlined the fact that most of the students he trained turned their hand to descriptive regional geography studies. Aware of the need to widen the training of students in the Faculty of Letters towards the natural sciences, De Martonne was insistent that the Paris Geography Institute should be a university institute, not a faculty institute.

His role in various institutions was considerable throughout his life; participation in the review committee of the *Annales de Géographie*, foundation of the French Geographers' Association (1920) and the International Geographical Union (1935-1952), President of the Geographical Society (1947-1952). Internationally his career coincided with the shift of the centre of world geographical excellence, with the decline of the German school and the rise of the French school. His career was marked out by a considerable number of journeys and missions abroad, contributing to reorganising the teaching of geography in many countries (Delfosse, 2001). A recognised academic, he also had a part in the redefinition of boundaries in Central Europe as an expert geographer in the Committee set up for the purpose after the First World War. De Martonne's scientific work is abundant (around 150 books and articles). He obtained a literary doctorate in 1902 and a science doctorate in 1907, and his scientific production makes him one of the first and last geographers to be capable of exercising expertise in all the developing fields of geography. He was admitted to the Academy of Science in 1942. He took an interest in regional geography (Carpathians, Central Europe) and drafted volume IV of the *Géographie Universelle* (directed by P. Vidal de la Blache and L. Gallois) concerning Central Europe. In 1909 he wrote a *Treatise of Physical Geography*, which became a reference and ran through at least nine editions. This achieved his ambition of developing a physical geography combining climatology, biogeography and zoology, but the position of choice (occupying a complete volume) fell to geomorphology. From the 1927 edition, De Martonne entrusted the updating of the volume on geomorphology to Auguste Chevalier, a botanist and specialist in colonial agronomy, and gave Lucien Cuatrecasas, a biologist, the task of updating the zoo-geography. With the collaboration of Lucien Aufrère, he developed the aridity index, and mapped the endorheic basins (regions with no drainage towards the oceans). This work led to seven publications between 1925 and 1928, one of which was in the *Geographical Review* in 1927. This work on aridity circulated widely among geographers and beyond. It appears among references quoted by American climatologists (in particular C.W. Thornthwaite) seeking to develop a more deductive and less empirical classification of climates.

His conception of geography belongs to a "realistic" epistemological stance. Geographical method is seen in continuity with the object of study, without deconstructing that object. Like other post-Vidal scholars, De Martonne considers reality as a given piece of data, independent from the researcher and liable to be apprehended directly. This insistence on concrete realities makes him, like Gallois, one of the guarantors of classic orthodoxy in geography (Orain, 2001). As a teacher and scholar totally dedicated to his discipline, De Martonne worked to make the discipline distinct from that of history, in particular at the time of the creation of the geography Agrégation (top teaching qualification based on a competitive examination) in 1943. He contributed to giving French geography two characteristics that have been long-lived: an emphasis on geomorphological analysis, and an emphasis on naturalistic explanations.

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