

# IT IS NOT ALL ROSES HERE: ALES HRDLICKA'S TRAVELOG AND HIS VISIT TO BUENOS AIRES IN 1910

(Um português p. 202)

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## Introduction

In may 1910 Ales Hrdlicka, as official representative for Washington based scientific institutions (the Bureau of American Ethnology<sup>1</sup>), arrived to Buenos Aires with two purposes: a) to attend the XVIIth International Congress of Americanists which was held that year in the Argentine capital, and b) to visit the sites with the evidence which seemed to demonstrate the remote antiquity of the peopling of the Americas. From Argentina, both Florentino and Carlos Ameghino supported the idea of a New World origin of humankind. This was the opposite idea to Hrdlicka's hypotheses, who with his Smithsonian Institution's colleagues, proclaimed that this process had been taken place in post-pleistocene times. Meltzer has stressed that the controversy around early and glacial man "became one of whether national scientific organizations (in this instance the United States Geological Survey and the BAE) encouraged or retarded scientific knowledge in their treatment of nonfederal practitioners whose views did not mesh with 'official' science and that this was a manifestation of a crisis in another scale, the growing pains wrought by the increasing professionalization of the nascent discipline of archaeology" (Meltzer 1983: 2).

On the other hand, in Argentina, Several times it was stressed that this visit was crucial in the process of refutation of Ameghino's ideas concerning the great age of humankind in South America (cf. Daino 1979, Politis 1988). It was also pointed out that thanks to Hrdlicka and his team, new and more accurately scientific *criteria* were established (Willey & Sabloff 1974). It is true that in Argentina, the year 1910 can be seen as a date around which it is possible to observe a change in the horizon of the currently anthropological ideas (Politis 1988). However, it should be not understood as a direct consequence of the visit of the American scholars. This change is linked to the reception of the theses on early man in the Argentine scientific context but, more directly, to the debates which lead the local

process of institutionalization of the anthropological sciences.

In this introduction it is important to underline that the critics and support to Ameghino neither originated nor extinguished with Hrdlicka's visit in 1910. On the contrary, the debates around his ideas influenced the tone of the current scientific discussion in the Argentine arena before and after his dead in 1911. Even more curious is the fact that after his dead, he became a sort of a laicist holy character for teachers and schoolpupils (Podgorny 1996).

On the other hand, Hrdlicka's conclusions have a non yet clearly analyzed role with regard to the acceptance of the finds in the Argentine Atlantic coast and to the weight of them in the "ameghinistas" debates. Therefore to understand the 1910 visit as a fact which closed the discussion, is to avoid the complexity of the long process by which Ameghino's ideas were truly deserted.

In this paper our aim is twofold. First, to publish the Ales Hrdlicka's letters to Ameghino and travelog pages devoted to his visit to Argentina attempting to see on which points Hrdlicka structured his perspective of the problem. Secondly, to analyze, the critics to Ameghino after 1912 in order to evaluate the reception of Hrdlicka's ideas in the Argentine context.

Although Hrdlicka's pages devoted to Argentina remained unpublished until today and therefore one could consider that they have no relevance for the understanding of Hrdlicka's work, it is important to recall the role of the scientist's private documents in the cultural and social context at the turn of the century. Scholars' and academics' letters, travelogs, notebooks belonged to the scientist's work and they were kept and even clasified by the scientist him/herself in order to – after his/her dead – leave them to archives as a kind of heritage for future generations and the future revision of their whole work. They believed in the central role they played in some important mission related not only with science but also with the role of science in the

building of the *patria*. Therefore the scientist archive is a primary source for understanding the self and social image of the scientist and the academic milieu. Taking this fact in mind, the private document was essentially conceived as public – its private trait was just transitory – and should be readen as if it would have been written with a message to future generations. Hrdlicka's travelog should be revisited since this perspective because it gives us the possibility of having a glimpse of some aspects of his work not always visible in his published books and papers. The travelog's typed manuscript was named by Hrdlicka himself *My trips and surveys* and it is kept at the Smithsonian Institution (Washington, D.C.) archives.

### Early Man in the Americas

At the turn of this century, the investigations carried out in Argentina attracted most of the attention concerning early man finds in South America. But also Brazil was under consideration, where there were the remains discovered between the years 1835 and 1844 by Lund – a Danish explorer – in certain caves in the district of Lagoa Santa. They consisted of a relatively large series of human skeletal remains and a single stone implement, which were considered as belonging to Quaternary times (Hrdlicka 1912: 11, Trajano de Moura 1889)

In Argentina, on the other hand, discoveries of relics attributed not only to ancient man but also to man's precursors, were very numerous. Among them, some débris of "fossils" from the Río Carcarañá (provincia de Santa Fe) and two "fossil" human crania from the valley of the Río Negro, northern Patagonia. With the exception of the so-called Ovejero remains from Northwestern Argentine, subsequent finds, numbering in all several thousand specimens and including both human bones and what were assumed to be traces of human activity, had all be obtained from the province of Buenos Aires (Hrdlicka 1912: 11)

Connected with these last finds, the reputation of Florentino Ameghino grew rapidly in the 1870s because of the investigations he and his brother Carlos conducted near Luján. Convinced they had shown human beings were contemporary with extinct mammals, Ameghino (1880) published in Paris and Buenos Aires, *La antigüedad del hombre en el*

*Plata (the antiquity of man in the Plata)*, work in two massive volumes.<sup>2</sup>

Between 1907 and 1911 Ameghino – who since 1902 was director of the Museo Nacional de Buenos Aires – focused on the study of mankind origins and described two specimens that he considered to be the precursors of humankind. In essence: Ameghino argued that people evolved on the Argentine Pampas and subsequently spread to other parts of the globe. This claim attracted considerable attention in the Ameghino's contemporary scientific milieu not only in Argentina but also in Europe and the United States (Ambrosetti 1912, Politis 1988, Patterson m.s.).

In Argentina there was other group of opinions, that represented by Santiago Roth and Robert Lehmann-Nitsche, Museo de La Plata based scientists who underestimated the great antiquity supported by the Ameghinos (Lehmann-Nitsche *et alii* 1907). The evidence and the discussion between both groups based on different kinds of vestiges from various sites. They consisted of five main groups of evidence, namely: a) baked earth or "tierra cocida", b) escoriae, c) used or worked stones, d) used or worked bones, and e) skeletal remains.

In the other extreme of the Americas, the discussion originated in the 1860's. In fact Ales Hrdlicka (1907) concluded with regard to the American early man, that in North America it appeared to established the fact that no specimen had come to light, which, from the standpoint of physical anthropology, represented other than a relatively modern man. He established as well a mode of doing science and solving the scientific problems, i.e. the work of the physical anthropologist included the common work of related disciplines:

*the possibility of discovering osseous remains of man of geologic antiquity in North America still exists, [...] any find to be accepted as establishing the existence of such man would have to be unequivocally authenticated by the anthropologist and the geologist working in cooperation* (Hrdlicka 1912: V).

What Hrdlicka is establishing here is the call for cooperation between geologists and physical anthropologists, but a more interesting trait is the role he gave themselves as certifiers of the veracity and of the authenticity of the find. As we will later analyze, we think that this is the most important

point associated to the new scientific behaviour for which Hrdlicka pleaded but also to the political role the federal researcher had.

These were the facts when the reports published in French by Lehmann-Nitsche *et alii* (1907) and by Ameghino about humankind fossil ancestors (Ameghino 1908, 1909), called Hrdlicka's attention (see Hrdlicka's letters to F. Ameghino of the 30th November and 23rd December 1909 and Ameghino's response of the 4th March 1910), in such a way that, in 1910, Bailey Willis and he decided to visit South America. Although Ameghino had suggested that "the best season for making excursions is from September to November and from March to May" (letter of the 4th March 1910), they decided to come in the worst one. The travelog would display Hrdlicka's complains and Ameghino's reasons for having suggested those months.

With the financial support of the Smithsonian Institution and "through the good offices of its current Secretary", the main goals of the expedition were: a) to examine the skeletal remains relating to early man and the geological deposits and localities from which the finds were reported, b) to collect osseous and archaeological specimens, and with them, c) to evaluate the issue of early man in South America. The results of their investigations and William Holmes's study of stone tools from localities considered to have great antiquity were published in Washington two years later (Hrdlicka 1912) as an issue of the Bureau of American Ethnology's bulletin. In this work the authors rejected the idea that mankind was geologically ancient in South America. They argued that: a) too little was known about the geological context of the finds; b) too much emphasis had been placed on chemical alteration of the bones; and c) the bones were all of modern human type but had been misinterpreted. With this work he concluded what he already knew: that man reached South America later in the post-glacial.

But going back to 1910, the Smithsonian mission reached Argentina early in May, when it had been taking place the Centenary of the Revolución de Mayo celebration, anniversary of the first creole government. This visit took just a pair of months. Willis stayed longer than Hrdlicka, who spent in the country two months and then traveled to Peru.

The first weeks of their stay were devoted to the study of skeletal material, samples of baked earth, scoriae and other objects believed to exhibit the activities of ancient man kept in the Nacional, Etnográfico and La Plata Museums. During their stay in the city of Buenos Aires they also examined the docks where the *Diprathomus* skull had been discovered. On May the 24th Willis and Hrdlicka left Buenos Aires to the South, to the Atlantic coast: Mar del Plata (where they joined Ameghino brothers), Necochea, Miramar, Monte Hermoso, Arroyo del Moro and Río Negro valley. In July both returned to Buenos Aires and from there they extended the trip to Tucumán, San Juan and Mendoza. Willis returned once more to Buenos Aires and Hrdlicka traveled to Perú. In 1912 Hrdlicka stated that, though utilized to the utmost, the time at his disposal in Argentina, was all too brief in order to explore the abounding anthropological problems and material of the country (Hrdlicka 1912). This point had been already mentioned in the letters to Ameghino after his visit to Argentina (letter to Ameghino of the 30th December 1910).

### The Travelog

Along the three months of his journey, Ales Hrdlicka kept a diary of trips and visits, that is kept at the Smithsonian Institution archives (Washington D.C.). In this travelog there are many few references to the scientific mission but, in surprising contrast, abounding comments about the conditions in which he developed his work. The subjects Hrdlicka considered in his private notebook could be classified as follows: a) the country and the social context (the people, the landscape, comparisons to the United States), b) the feelings, and, c) Scientific remarks, the colleagues, the Native Peoples.

#### a) Argentina and Latin America: between the Avenida de Mayo and the Far West

Prior to Buenos Aires, the ship stopped in Rio de Janeiro. They went ashore to visit the Museo Nacional<sup>3</sup>, although mentioned, any comments were made about it. Rio impressed because of the beautiful palms, the expensive cost of life, the statuary of the city and the nastiness which avoid them to enjoy the place just in the protected sphere around the scientific institution (page 587 of the travelog). Hrdlicka, comparing Rio with old México,

framed the city in “the regular Spanish-Portuguese conditions”.

Buenos Aires is described as other expensive city that, because of the celebrations of the centenary of the Revolución de Mayo, displayed richness and modernity in the streets and everywhere. But not in the hotel where they stayed, that had no means of heating. Neither in the faces of the military and police forces, that by the stage of siege, took over the working class discontent:

*...state of siege in the city, and at the same time of such festivities as they, it is said, have never had here before...For days one could scarcely pass along the streets for the crowds of people. On the main thoroughfare there was a flag in every window, and at night the houses of ‘the Avenida’<sup>4</sup> were prettily and lavishly illuminated all over the outside with lines of electric bulbs. It was a great national holiday, lasting for over a week. But under the cover the cauldron of discontents is seething, the workmen are in dangerous mood, the military alert and serious (pp. 588-589)*

Hrdlicka met and reported two phenomena that belong to the so-called “espíritu del Centenario” (Centenary spirit) (José Luis Romero 1965). This Centenary spirit includes both a) a patriotic fanfare by which Argentine elites celebrated the years went by since the independence and which includes the display of the achievements and of the definitive triumph over the “Argentine desert; and, b) on the other hand, the undesired consequences of the same process. In fact, the anarchist and socialist unions and worker movements were repressed by special laws and by the policial forces (Romero 1965). Between 1909-1910 the policy against anarchism reached its climax, as well as the anarchist activist actions (Zimmermann 1995). So closer the Centenary stronger were the social conflicts. The anarchist press was against the celebration and the worker unions went to the general strike in May 1910<sup>5</sup>, to which the government answered by declaring the state of siege, just when the American mission arrived.

Hrdlicka left Buenos Aires on the vespre of May 25. In June a bomb exploded during an opera performance at the Colón theatre. Later on it was the Law of National Defense (Ley de Defensa Nacional) against the anarchism was approved, in order to restrict the right of meeting and of entry to the country (Zimmermann 1995). By then, the Smithsonian mission was on the road to the South

Atlantic coast, or in Hrdlicka’s universe terms, towards a place very similar to the rudeness and primitivism of the American West:

*The country here is like a part of our west, and people a good deal like those of Mexico, so that I scarcely feel as if in a strange world. Even the Indian things are much like those with us. Much here is somewhat primitive and crude, but not wild (p. 590)*

Hrdlicka saw also similarities between the aspect of the men they met and the universal stereotype of the brigand. The prejudice, full of literature images confronted itself with the generous receptions the scientists had:

*Some of the men one meets along these coasts, unshaven, unkempt, sturdy, Italians, look for all the world like so many book-type brigands; but they are really kind people, as honest as others and generous. Never as we are safer, I feel sure, than on such journeys and among such people as are these rural simple Argentinians (p. 594)*

The state of abandonment of those Argentinians of the Pampas is reinforced in Hrdlicka’s diary by means of: a) the mention of the medical assistance he gave them, and b) the collaboration given to the Viedma’s governor and police chief for solving a case, the disappearing of a farmer. The farmer was taking for dead and a peddler was accused of murderer because of the find in the farmer’s garden of an skeleton, which it was supposed to be the missing farmer’s corpse. The “Turkish” hawker, in spite of the fact that he had left Viedma a long time ago, was searched, captured and made prisoner. Since then he was kept in jail. The bones of the skeleton were, however, too clean for belonging to a recent dead; so Viedma’s authorities asked Hrdlicka for his opinion:

*So I was asked to examine the remains and determine their connection...a first glance at the skull was sufficient for the recognition of an Indian. It was an old Indian skeleton, dating doubtless from long before the occupation of the valley by white people (p. 601)*

The prisoner – taking into account that there was not a corpse – was freed. As the anthropologist commented, the city authorities knew that the skeleton – considering its traits – was not a body buried a few weeks ago. However, they needed an external sentence and a scientist in order to free themselves from the prejudice against the “Turco”,

whose nickname arose suspicions and invented murderers and mort<sup>6</sup>.

### b) The feelings: the cold avoid me to write

One of the most frequent tropes of the travelog is the South American winter: the impossibility of writing in the evening, when they returned from their field journeys, is explained by the cold, which reigns in all the hotels and all the subsequent lodges they had stayed along their trip, both in Buenos Aires as well as inland. The complete lack of heating is one of the issues which cause the most astonishing comments. Nor wood nor charcoal nor oil, just the sheats and the need to not to keep calm in the room:

*It is not all roses here, however, by any means. It is chilly, so that one can scarcely write in the hotel room, which has no means of heating (May 11, Buenos Aires) The only way is to walk, or pack boxes, and then go directly to sleep into the cold sheaths with the head on a tough, wool-filled long narrow pillow (May 30, Mar del Plata) Cold, cold...It freezes nearly nightly and rises scarcely ever above 10° in the day; besides which there is the cold wind and even rain. Want to write evenings when not too tired and cannot, the hands are stiff and the feet as if immersed in cold water. Even now had to take hard exercise outside to be able to sit down, in overcoat, and put down a few words before departure for still further south, for Rio Negro, where probably it will be still colder. The day before yesterday saw the first stove and first fire in this country...The weak are eliminated, the strong get used to it. (June 13, Buenos Aires coast)As time went on the cold reached to the very marrow of one's bones and the teeth chattered. It was the most penetrating cold I had ever experienced (June, trip Bahía Blanca-Río Negro)*

The cold, the sounds, the flavours, the odors, the humidity, the tiredness are notoriously evident in the travelog. Apparently, extreme and strange feelings only for the observer: the “argentinos” seemed to live this rudeness without realising it. Hrdlicka could not resist the temptation of dreaming of trees plantations for wood, possibility that the natives seemed not to consider (page 591 of the travelog). Neither did he the habit of sharing “mate” and “bombilla” for sorber hot water. In a way, testifying the rudeness of the work on his body, Hrdlicka certifies to have been in the place and to have done the travel. The feelings will not be mentioned in his published work written on his Washington's desk publicación, but as Outram

(1995) has stressed with regard to Humboldt's travels, the South American experience leaves traces on the body which have to be exhibited as a part of the proof of having done the trip. In Hrdlicka's case, the cold that reaches to the marrow of one's bone became the rethoric evidence which certifies that the self who writes is the self who had traveled to remote regions strange to the everyday life experience.

### c) The scientific trip

Besides the several complains which arose because of the weather and of the food, it seems that the attitude to fieldwork and the good will of the local people, helped in order to resolve these difficulties: the work was made easy at the museums they visited, Willis 's invaluable assistance as geologist, the local scholars good will <sup>7</sup>, the occasional trip companions and collaborators' generosity. So this kindness confronts himself with his guilty about his *a priori*:

*Work progressing well and there are now substantial hopes of adding something worthwhile to previous endeavors. All treat us generously and give every facility for investigation, until I feel sad, for it is plain already that many serious errors have been made here, and that our findings must contradict, in fact overturn, cherished conclusions of the very men who treat us so fairly (p. 588)*

It is interesting to underline here that these concluding asserts about the results which the visit must carry, occurs on May the 17 th, six days later from the arrival and before having visited the field. On June the 13th Hrdlicka pointed out that *more than half the task here – search for traces of early man – is already over* (p. 591).

One of the few remarks on the fieldwork done in the dunes zone in the North of Bahía Blanca, underlines the misinterpretation the Argentine scientists had made, i.e. to have considered a secondary association as primary:

*Among these dunes lived once some of the aborigines of Argentina and here they left many of their stone implements, with other objects of their industry, and here also they left some of their burials. These burials were made in ground in which were many fossils, came thus into some strange contacts, and it was on this secondary association of the human bones with those of extinct animals that some of the claims for ancient man in Argentina had been based by the local workers. Spent many*

pleasant and busy hours *among these dunes collecting and examining. It was virginal ground and full of scientific as well as other interest.* There was some of the sport of science at its best (pp. 594-95, our emphasis)

A twofold interesting observation, where successful scientific work is associated with both the pleasure it causes and to the climax of science understood as sport. One's success and pleasure linked to the other's mistake...

The second reference to excavations and scientific material collection occurs in the pages devoted to Patagonia, where he finds fossilized skulls. Already at the end of the trip, in the Río Negro valley, the reports refer to contemporary Native Peoples: tehuelches, pampas and fueguinos. In order to describe them he uses traits as stature, pigmentation, blood purity, calling the attention to the lack of empiric proofs about the legend of the Patagonian giants.

Since the travelog, with this evidence he will prepare his report on early man in South America.

### The Criticism to Ameghino

In order to analyse how Ameghino's work was criticised, it is important to underline three points. The first, which were the aspects that were found false or effective. Secondly, in which academic context it occurred, and third, when it took place. With regard to the latter, there is a main division between the criticism before and after Ameghino's death. His ideas were not left either at the same time and nor as a whole (Soler 1968). On the contrary, if we consider "Ameghino" as compact entity, in the years after his death its name became a national icon. "Santo moderno" (modern saint) (Ingenieros 1911), "savant" and "archetype of Argentinianess" (Rojas 1922: 199-235) were the current ways of referring to him publically after his death.

In 1919 José Ingenieros published, addressed "to school teachers", a handbook explaining "Ameghino's doctrine". In the same work, Ingenieros classified Ameghino's work in three elements: facts, doctrines and hypothesis (Ingenieros 1919: 24). The facts were Ameghino's experience, the doctrines were the by him posed generalizations and the hypothesis, the not confirmed ideas.

According to this, Hrdlicka, Holmes and Willis criticised firstly, Florentino Ameghino's experience. This should be remarked because what the Smithsonian team was putting under suspicion was Ameghino's ability for using scientific criteria. But for both Ameghino and Hrdlicka, a site with stratigraphy and contextual materials were the elements on which the proof should be based. Hrdlicka considered that Ameghino could not read the elements which built the proof.

### Early Man In South America

With *Early man in South America*, Hrdlicka concluded his work on this subject. In this volume, profusely illustrated and world widespread, he analyzed one by one Ameghino's finds and interpretations. Since then and out of Argentina, the Ameghinean model began to lose followers inside the current scientific milieu at the same time that Hrdlicka's ideas reached their apogee.

Hrdlicka's criticism and doubts with regard to the ideas of the Argentinian scientific groups – as we mentioned above, one led by Ameghino and the other by Lehmann-Nitsche – based on: a) the reports which dealt with the finds of human remains up to 1907 were incomplete and unsatisfactory, and b) the records of the many cases were full of defects and uncertainties. In 1912, and before in his diary, Hrdlicka stated that the journey was undertaken with no prejudice or preconceived opinions, though in view of the defective reports, skepticism concerning certain details or finds was unavoidable (Hrdlicka 1912).

Hrdlicka concluded in the first pages of his report:

*The evidence is, up to the present time, unfavorable to the hypothesis of man's great antiquity, and specially to the existence of man predecessors in South America; and it does not sustain the theories of the evolution of man in general, or even of that of the American man alone, in the southern continent. The facts gathered attest everywhere merely the presence of the already differentiated and relatively modern American Indian (Hrdlicka 1912: VIII)*

For Hrdlicka human – both skeletal and cultural – remains' antiquity, dated from non historic times should be determined taken into account skull morphology and association between remains and geologic deposits and biological remains. Although the association criterium was the same at

Ameghino's, the difference between both scientists is the question for the antiquity of man in the Americas. Hrdlicka held the idea of a relatively late peopling of the continent (in Holocene times) but also was a follower of the idea of mankind evolution. Indeed, his idea about a modern *American Indian* is linked to a evolutionist frame. For him humankind development occurred not in the Americas. The American Indian should have arrived to the Americas as *Homo sapiens*, for what its study was no relevant for the anthropogenetical theories. This is the most important difference between Ameghino and Hrdlicka: the relevance of American archaeology and anthropology with regard to man evolution theories. For Hrdlicka, none, while for Ameghino was crucial (Podgorny 1994).

Hrdlicka preferred explanations which rejected the antiquity issue:

*It seems very probable that the natives, the remains of whose workshops exist among the médanos, were well acquainted with the "white" stone, or quartzite, industry before they began working the beach pebbles, which, or the flakes from which, were to serve as the substitute for the stone found farther inland...Whether the Indians used the "black" flaked pebbles to any extent as implements is not as yet certain. If used, they were utilized, in all probability, only locally and not by any of the inland tribes. The explanation of this appears simple. Inland the pebble material is absent, while the sources of the quartzite were frequently nearer...We have found, then on the coast of the Province of Buenos Aires archeological remains of but a single culture, with a local phase in working pebbles; a culture that can be referred to only one period, though this may have been of some extent, and to only one people, namely, the Indian of the same province; and this culture can not possibly be of any great, especially of geologic, antiquity (Hrdlicka 1912: 121-122)*

The idea of cultural phases as differences linked to place and not to time was a constant both in Hrdlicka and Holmes (1912):

*it may be said that in any area occupied by primitive peoples having a range as great as 400 miles in length of coastal territory it is to be expected that more than one tribe, possibly more than one linguistic stock, would be found, even at one and the same period...it does not seem unreasonable to suppose that separated tribes practicing forms fact in chipped stone as distinctive as those enumerated above should have occupied the middle coastal region of Argentina at one and the same time (Holmes 1912: 145)*

They criticised as well the existence of "*La industria de la piedra quebrada*" (Ameghino 1910). Summarizing, Hrdlicka and Holmes criticised Ameghino the following: a) the facts (Ingenieros 1919); b) related to these facts and to their own ideas about antiquity of man in the Americas, the antiquity of man in America and Ameghino's anthropogenetic doctrine.

But it is important to underline that they were not doubting of the evolution of mankind. The questions to Ameghino's hypothesis were posed from similar criteria, what is speaking of a sort of a common scientific language. Hrdlicka's criticism to Ameghino and to the other followers of the great antiquity of man in the Americas can be seen as a refutation to a counterevidence of his hypothesis. It is clear that what every one was discussed was the problem of "antiquity". With regard to this, Holmes suggested:

*(the writer finds it) more logical to begin with the known populations of the region whose culture is familiar to us and which furnishes lithic artifacts ranging in form from the simplest fractures stone to the well-made and polished implements, and prefers to interpret the finds made, unless sufficient evidence is offered to the contrary, in the illuminating light of known conditions and of well-ascertained facts rather than to refer them to hypothetical races haled up from the distant past (Holmes 1912: 150)*

### The antiquity of Man in Buenos Aires

In Argentina and after 1910, the problem of antiquity of man remained open and was the main issue at several meetings of the *Sociedad Científica Argentina* and the main goal of the Museo de La Plata and Museo de Historia Natural de Buenos Aires expeditions. These scientific fieldworks were not taking into account of the history of Argentine archaeology because of several reasons more connected with the contemporary state of the field than with the problem as was seen in its context. One of them is the fact that – although they tended to solve an anthropological and chronological problem – the explorations were led by geologists. The geological fieldwork carried out in the Province of Buenos Aires by the Museo de La Plata during Torres administration, attempted to solve this enigma (Torres 1926).

But what is important to stress here is that after Ameghino's death in 1911, the problem of antiquity

of man became a problem strictly concerned with the chronology of strata and materials, where the unique valid evidence began to be a non questionable association. In this framework, the discussion became “ameghinist” more than transformist. The “ameghinism” was a trend which based on the following assumptions: a) Ameghino was a savant; b) Ameghino was Argentinian and c) Ameghino was a holy laicist saint . To prove or to refute his hypotheses, to edit his complete work in order to spread his doctrine, to prove his birth in Luján or in Italy were the issues around which journalists, scientists, militaries, politicians, priests discussed along the twenty years which followed Ameghino’s death (Torcelli 1915). The “ameghinism” had no equivalence with none of the current anthropological/scientific doctrines outside Argentina but it was the main trend in the Argentina of the 1920s and 1930s. The main objective of the ameghinism was the cult to the savant and had a strong influence in the educational and pedagogical circles. The ameghinism was the framework within took place this overwhelming set of finds, evidences and counterevidences collected and published by Daino (1979).

On the other hand, the emergence of a new kind of analysis in the archaeology of the Province of Buenos Aires and of Argentina, is connected with the new scientific and teaching institutions previous to Hrdlicka’s visit. The foundation of the careers in the facultad de Filosofía y Letras, the first chairs for anthropology at the facultad de Ciencias Naturales in 1906 (Lehmann-Nitsche 1912), the foundation of the Museo Etnográfico, of the Museo Histórico Nacional in 1905 and the new educational role of the Museo de La Plata made of the presentation of the past a mean by which the historic and nationalist restauration could take place. Without knowing it, Hrdlicka could report one of the most important events of the Centenary spirit; but he would not have imagined that his scientific Argentinian counterpart would become a national icon and a cult object of Argentinian teachers (Podgorny 1996).

Adding to this, the organization of archaeological and anthropological data for their public presentation adopted a spacial criterium more than a historical or a chronological one because of the uncertainty about the antiquity of the remains. It is important to stressed again that the doubt

arose before Hrdlicka’s visit. The task of museums and universities in the 1920s was the consolidation of the teaching and of the displaying of archaeology and anthropology to students and general public, meanwhile the “ameghinism” had a great influence in the research carried out in the sites and zones investigated by Ameghino (Podgorny e.p.).

### **Concluding Remarks: The end of the Naturalist-Traveller**

After Willey & Sabloff (1974) the opinions of both Holmes and Hrdlicka, were crucial not only in the South American case but also – and for them more important – for the history of North American Archaeology. The former presented the latter as the implacable judges that with strictness and efficiency and with an ever more acute aims, went site by site doubting of the finds which probably contained evidence of a pleistocene or even earlier peopling of the Americas (Willey & Sabloff 1974). They also stressed that this fact had two consequences; the first, it contributed to establish more acute scientific criteria; the second, it has a delay effect – because of the fear of the descalification – over the study of early man in America. But if we have into consideration that in the United States in 1926, the Folsom site was interpreted as from pleistocene times (Willey & Sabloff 1974), the second of this comments has no basis. The dates were so close that they not allow to establish that the early man issue was avoided even during Hrdlicka’s strong influence. Willey and Sabloff (1974) did not realise that American anthropology was more than that did in Washington (Meltzer 1983). Even when the facts were as Willey and Sabloff described, the consequences would better interpreted as a less scientific procedure, at least with regard to the scientific context of those times and the ways of knowledge. If Hrdlicka’s fieldwork (in the Plata case, two months and a half) were the definitive sentence over a site on the bases of a supposedly more important experience, this is not a trait of Hrdlicka’s scienceness but of his authority in the American academic milieu. Anyway, Hrdlicka’s authority do not seem to be of great meaning in the Argentinian scientific context. In the 1910s La Plata based scientists did not include any mention to Hrdlicka’s work and continued to work with European references. The PhD dissertation on the “Atlas de Monte Hermoso” by Teodoro de



Urquiza, Lehmann – Nitsche's student, has as references only European authors. A very contrasting fact to that pointed out by Meltzer (1983), who perceives the early man issue and debates in the United States at the turn of the century as tool of building an American anthropology as different to the European traditions.

On the other hand, in the last few years several papers and books have been published that encompass a wide range of concerns with the practice of ethnography in relation to the act of writing. The rethoric strategies of ethnographic description were defined from the point of view of their efficacy for building a verisimilar with reality. The most important ability of ethnographic description bases on the fact of being capable of building the image of "to have been there" (Geertz 1987, Clifford & Marcus 1986). In fact, "to have been there" is for many authors (cf. Mercier 1966) the requisite which remarks the birth of modern ethnography in opposition to the descriptions and generalizations made earlier from the scientist's cabinet, reading and writing without visiting the place where the facts occurred.

Adding to this, the studies on the history of both archaeology and the archaeological thought (Willey & Sabloff 1974, Trigger 1989) take for granted that the modern archaeological practice involves material culture, objects and fieldwork. If there were a "to have been there" for the archaeologists, it would not be the illusion of having been in the past, but in the space where the past events took place. The need of the fact that the same person who works with the remains in the laboratory had been who can testify how the remains were found is the novelty with which is linked Hrdlicka's authority (Podgorny 1994).

But if fieldwork and the collection of material remains was already a trait of the scientific archaeology of the XIXth century XIX, they did not imply that the identity of the collector should be that of the scholar's. The figure of the "Naturalist-Traveller" ("naturalista viajero") was embodied in the organization of natural and anthropological sciences between 1880 and 1910<sup>8</sup> (Podgorny 1992). It meant the allowance of at least two different individuals, i.e., anyone, with the instructions for collecting – instruction that were written and published by the scientific institutions – could hold the authority – and so the ability – for collecting

several kinds and sorts of things, which later should be observed and analysed in the laboratories by other persons. Hrdlicka's visit is connected with a new kind of scientific behaviour: it is the scholar (him)self with his authority and prestigious who should certify and find the "in situ".

From this point of view, Hrdlicka's visit can be related to the changes occurred in the archaeology of the province of Buenos Aires. As Daino (1979) has pointed out, the research carried out at the Atlantic coast of the Province of Buenos Aires did not vanish, and on the contrary, it started to be more frequent. The antiquity remained as the main question, but, what disappeared was Ameghino himself. His dead in 1911 involved the lost of the other voice with authority in this debate. The several expeditions to the sites which arose doubts is one of the most conspicuous traits of the period 1912-1924.

As Politis (1988) underlined, in those years there was no a unique self evident and chaos apparently reigned. However, this chaos – which included, in the scenery of the sites, the taking of depositions and the notarized of statements by very well known scientists as witnesses-, allows us to define this period as the moment where the criterium of "presence of the scientist in the place of the find" became unavoidable for the practice of archaeology.

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*Caras y caretas* reported the “Turkish” were not only spoiled but also eaten. This note referred to the “cannibals in Río Negro”: “De pasto de la voracidad de los siniestros personajes en cuestión ha servido la carne de esos pobres y sufridos turcos que se internan en el corazón del territorio argentino aún no cruzado por las carreteras y los rieles de la trocha angosta, ofreciendo en venta baratijas de insignificante precio” (*Caras y Caretas*, 5 de febrero de 1910) (The flesh of these poor and long-suffering Turkish who travel into the core of the Argentinian territory, not yet civilized by either roads nor railroads, for selling trifles at derisive prices became the feed of these depraved personages’ – the so called cannibals’ – voracity)

<sup>7</sup>Mentioned as well in the letters exchanged with Ameghino after his visit, where it is clear the good terms of the relationship even once Hrdlicka had started to write his critical work to South American early man (letters of the 12th September and 24 November 1910 from Ameghino to Hrdlicka and of the 24th October and 30th December 1910 from Hrdlicka to Ameghino)

<sup>8</sup>In the second half of the XIXth century this occurred also in the United States, where for instance, the Smithsonian Institution published in 1862 by G.Gibbs, *Instructions for archaeological Investigations in the United States*. These *Instructions* aimed at travellers and residents of the “Indian country” were circulated to gather information on the physical type, arts and manufactures of the original inhabitants of North America (Meltzer 1983: 5-6)

<sup>1</sup>The Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE) was founded in 1879 in the same congressional session that created the United States Geological Survey. It was an arm of the Smithsonian Institution and in its early years it concerned itself with ethnological and linguistic studies of the disappearing Native American groups in the western states. Since 1881 it began to channel its energies and financial resources into strictly archaeological matters. Meltzer has underlined the importance of the BAE’s work on the Paleolithic issue in the North American early man debate (Meltzer 1983: 11-12)

<sup>2</sup> Florentino Ameghino’s thought has been described as Darwinian evolutionism with a Lamarckian mark (Márquez Miranda 1951: 132-140, Madrazo 1985, González 1986). Ameghino was without any doubt a follower of the evolutionism and he perceived himself as a member of “the phalanx of young naturalists” (Ameghino 1880: ) that had adopted the transformism as framework for explaining nature and natural history.

<sup>3</sup>The Museo Nacional of Rio de Janeiro was founded in 1818. Since 1870 it published “Archivos do Muscu Nacional”, gave seminars and carried out research. Its focus was natural history (Schwarz 1989)

<sup>4</sup>Reference to *Avenida de Mayo*, one of the most emblematic works of the modernization of Buenos Aires after it became capital of the country in 1880. On the basis of proposals of the previous decade, the city major Torcuato de Alvear (1880-1887) suggested the trace of a boulevard of 30 metres wide, which would connect “*plaza de Mayo*” – where it was located both the political and economic heart of the traditional city-, with the by then West boundary of the consolidated city (*avenida Callao*). Because of several conflicts regarding the approval of the law of expropriations (which would allow to start the Avenida), Alvear did not see the beginning of his project. The Avenida de Mayo is open in 1894. Meanwhile arose the idea of crowning it with the building in Callao of the new national Capitolium and a big rectangular square. This would be finished for the Centenario. With these works the most important civic and political axis of the city was established. In 1913 under the Avenida started to run the first underground of South America. (A.A.V.V. 1990).

<sup>5</sup>In 1902 it was passed the so called “Ley de Residencia” (law of residence) by which the expulsion from Argentina of the so considered anti-social foreigners became possible.

<sup>6</sup>These “turcos” (“Turkish”) was – and still is – the nickname used in Argentinian argot for referring to the immigrants from the Ottoman Empire) peddlers, who used to cross the Patagonian territories, were being murdered by a group of ransackers in the same year of 1910. As



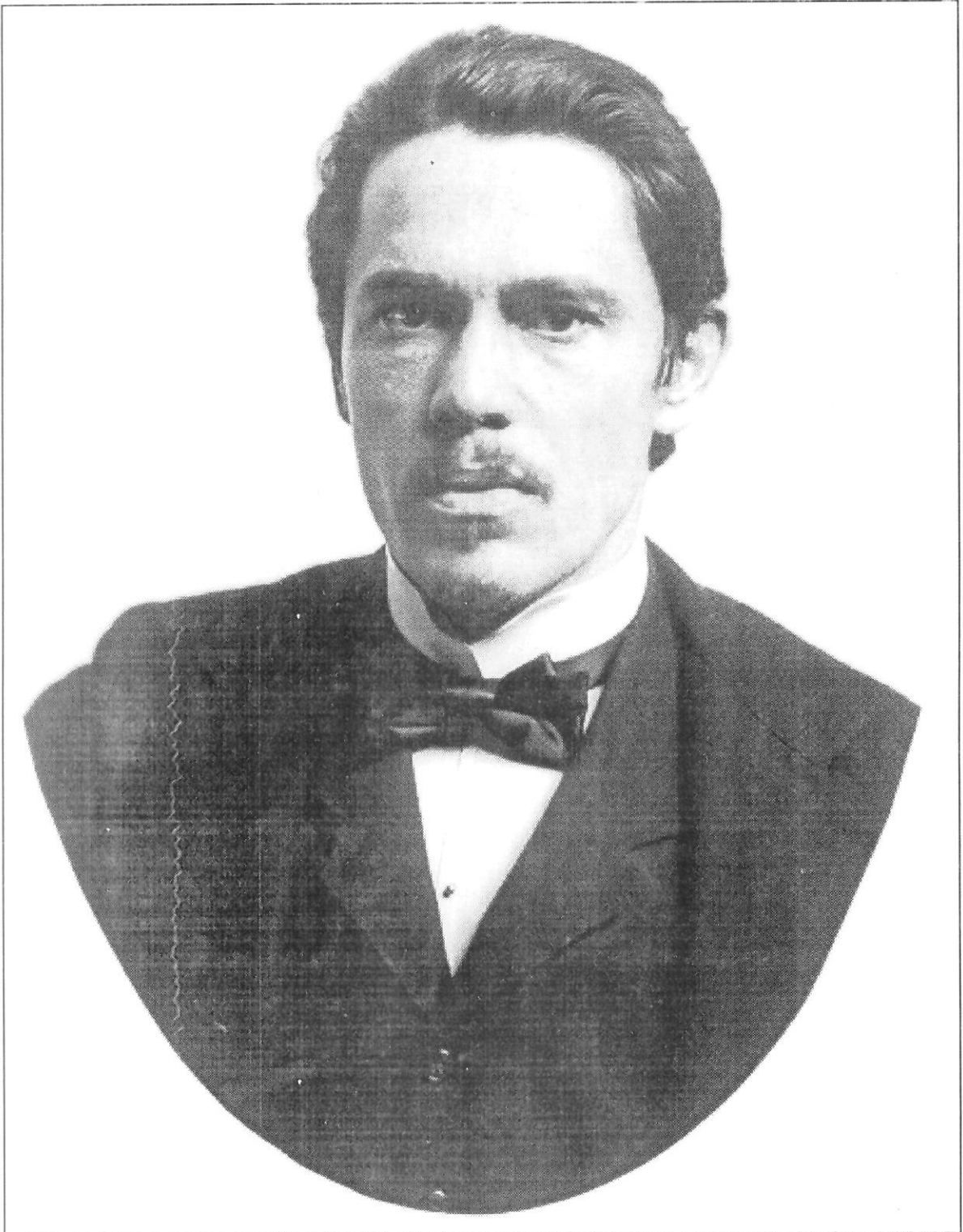


Fig. 1 - Ales Hrdlicka em 1903 recém llegado a Smithsonian.



Fig. 2 - Ales Hrdlicka em 1934? en Alaska.