

Argentina

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INTRODUCTION: A BRIEF HISTORY AND CURRENT STATE OF PHYSICAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN ARGENTINA

Descriptions about aboriginal populations that inhabited Argentina began in the 16th century, a few decades after the European conquest. However, it was during the 19th century that travellers and explorers, most of them of European origin, carried out more systematic studies. In the second half of the 19th century, when the Argentine state was not yet consolidated, the government looked to define its political frontiers by expanding its economic control over vast territories, as well as over aboriginal populations (Podgorny 1999, 2008; Podgorny and Lopes 2008). For this reason, the Argentine State organized military and scientific missions in order to increase the knowledge about its geography and human populations (Podgorny 1999, 2008; Podgorny and Lopes 2008; Farro 2009). The war against these aborigines, known as *La Conquista del Desierto* ('The Conquest of the Desert'), began in 1879 and resulted in thousands of native people being killed or captured.

Around this time, the *Academia de Ciencias de Córdoba* (Academy of Sciences of Córdoba), and *Sociedad Científica Argentina* (Argentine Scientific Society) were established, as well as the first museums with a positivist philosophical approach, for example the *Museo de La Plata* (Museum of La Plata) and the *Museo Etnográfico Juan Bautista Ambrosetti* (Juan Bautista Ambrosetti Ethnographic Museum). These museums served to consolidate anthropological activities (Carnese *et al.* 1992) and to house and expose natural and cultural objects recovered in scientific missions carried out by the Argentine government during the military campaigns (Podgorny 2008). Private exhibitions and museums, established some years later, also contributed to the increase in knowledge about American Indians (Podgorny and Lopes 2008).

All material recovered during previous years was organized as scientific collections that have been, until the present day, invaluable material for research. The majority of the collections belonged to native people from all over the Argentine territory. They increased in quantity over the years through different ways of acquisition, although the curation of some of these today may be regarded as non-ethical or questionable. For instance, those institutions also promoted the organizing of new missions, the buying and exchange of objects from private collectors or from other foreign institutions (e.g., from Brussels and Paris), in order to increase the diversity of their collections (Farro 2009). Several private collections were also donated

(Podgorny 2008). During 'The Conquest of the Desert', some people who accompanied the army kept the skulls of aborigines killed during the battles and even robbed the remains and grave goods of some Indians chiefs, such as those of Mariano Rosas, Chipitruz, Gherenal and Callfucura (Zeballos 1960). The skull was the only anatomical part exhumed during these military expeditions, and was later donated to the Museo de La Plata (Lehmann-Nitsche 1910). The Museo de La Plata, under the direction of Francisco P. Moreno, also held some people captured in 'The Conquest of the Desert'. The chiefs of some Patagonian populations, such as Inakayal, Sayeweke and Foyel, as well as their relatives, lived in this institution between 1885 and 1895 (Farro 2009). Some of them died in the museum, whereas others were returned to Patagonia. After their death, many anatomical parts, especially the brain and the skeleton, were incorporated into anthropological collections (Lehmann-Nitsche 1910).

Following the establishment of the first scientific institutions, further institutionalization of physical anthropology arose when the first courses were introduced. The first course in Anthropology was run by a German-born scientist, Professor Robert Lehmann-Nitsche, at the Universidad de Buenos Aires (University of Buenos Aires) in 1903 (Podgorny 2006). In 1905 and 1906, the first professorships were set up at the Universidad de Buenos Aires and the Universidad de La Plata, respectively, both organized by Lehmann-Nitsche. The first degrees in anthropology were established at these universities at the end of the 1950s (Carnese *et al.* 1992).

According to Carnese *et al.* (1992: 36), it was during the second half of the 19th century that biological anthropology began in Argentina as a separate discipline, independent from other natural sciences. Carnese *et al.* (1992) have divided the history of the discipline into three periods, according to the principal ideas that dominated the investigations. Between 1860 and 1920 studies were carried out by Argentine and foreign researchers and focused on human origins and descriptions of South American aborigines (Carnese *et al.* 1992; Marcellino 2002; Carnese and Pucciarelli 2007). The publication of anthropometric measurements had been a common activity since 1874 with Francisco Moreno, an Argentine explorer and naturalist (Podgorny 2006). The French school of anthropology, with the studies of Paul Broca, was influential. During this period, Darwinist theory was adopted and evolutionism gradually replaced creationist and catastrophist paradigms (Carnese *et al.* 1992). Florentino Ameghino made important contributions to anthropology and palaeontology, despite the fact that his theory about human origins in the Argentine Pampas was based on invalid evidence.

The period between 1920 and 1960 was dominated by diffusionist and typological paradigms (Carnese *et al.* 1992). Most studies consisted of skeletal descriptions, lacking in evolutionary explanation. When genetic studies developed, serological indicators were also incorporated into these 'catalogues' of human variation (Carnese *et al.* 1992; Carnese and Pucciarelli 2007).

Since 1960, biological anthropology has incorporated concepts derived from neo-Darwinism and molecular biology (Carnese and Pucciarelli 2007). Studies have focused on several issues, such as micro-evolutionary mechanisms, adaptation, environmental influences on growth and development of past and present populations, bioarchaeology, epidemiology and genetics, among others.

Anthropological studies have been published for more than a century; however, it was not until the end of the 1980s that a group of physical anthropologists from the Universidad de Buenos Aires, Universidad de La Plata, Universidad de Río Cuarto (University of Buenos Aires, University of La Plata and University of Río Cuarto), among others, started to meet together with the objective of unifying teaching methods and to exchange knowledge about their particular areas of study. Following on from these meetings, the First National Meeting of Biological Anthropology was organized in September 1993 at the Museo de La Plata. As a result of the success of this meeting, with more than 100 participants and 40 papers presented, it was

decided to create the Asociación Argentina de Antropología Biológica or AABA (Association of Biological Anthropology of Argentina). In addition, it was decided to create a body that would document the home-grown scientific production, and thus the *Revista Argentina de Antropología Biológica*, or RAAB (*Argentinean Journal of Biological Anthropology*) was established. Since 1996, meetings of the AABA have been organized bi-annually and the RAAB is published annually and recently indexed in Latindex. More information can be found on the website of the Argentine Association of Biological Anthropology (www.fcnym.unlp.edu.ar/aabra/).

Biological anthropology has also been central in forensic science, mainly forensic anthropology and archaeology. In 1984 the Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense, or EAAF (Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team) was created in order to investigate human rights violations in Argentina during the military government that ruled from 1976 to 1983. The EAAF is a non-governmental, non-profit making, scientific organization that conducts forensic investigations in Argentina and, since 1986, in around 30 countries throughout America, Asia, Africa and Europe. More information can be found on their website (www.eaaf.org/: EAAF 2009).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL HUMAN REMAINS AND LEGISLATION

Archaeological legislation

The national law 25,743 (2003) regulates the registration, permission and control of the Argentine archaeological and palaeontological heritage. This law does not make explicit mention of human remains. However, in Article 2 it defines what it considers to be archaeology and this definition includes human remains:

The archaeological heritage is defined as movable and immovable property or remains regardless of its nature found on the surface, underground or within territorial waters that can provide information about the socio-cultural groups that have inhabited the country from pre-Colombian times to recent historical periods.

Lex 25,7434, Article 2 [author's translation]

The Instituto Nacional de Antropología y Pensamiento Latinoamericano, or INAPL (National Institute of Anthropology and Latin American Thinking) is the national authority in charge of the application of the law. According to Article 6, it is the responsibility of each Province (the main territorial division in Argentina) to apply such law and it depends on each province to decide which organization has competence on this issue.¹ The competent provincial organization grants permits, organizes the registration of sites and collections and also applies sanctions to offenders.

In order to carry out an archaeological or palaeontological excavation it is necessary to obtain a permit. The government of each province or community grants permits that should contain the following information (Article 24): name of the scientific person and assistants who are participating in the excavation (with corresponding ID or passport number), name of the institution, map or topographical plan of the location for the proposed excavation, a research plan and its logistical capacity, specific work plan and a timetable for the excavation. For foreign researchers (Article 25) it is necessary, in addition, to have some link with a national scientific institution or Argentine university.

Excavations or removal of materials performed on archaeological or palaeontological sites without given permission will be considered an offence and will lead to confiscation of any

material discovered (Article 39). If materials are discovered accidentally, it is necessary to inform the responsible authority of the province or the community; even the police if necessary (Articles 13 and 40).

HUMAN REMAINS AND LEGISLATION

According to the law, there are no guidelines or regulations regarding who can study human remains. When human remains are discovered by accident, regardless of their antiquity, they fall under the remit of the judicial system, after informing the police authorities. In the justice system, there is nothing that indicates that an anthropologist or archaeologist should intervene. On some occasions, forensic doctors may become involved, and in others, an archaeologist is called in from a research institution, such as the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF).

The competent authority of the province or the community can grant temporary loan of collections for research or exhibition inside or outside its jurisdiction (Article 21 and 50). The exchange, donation or barter of materials is not permitted (Article 52). However, the making of casts of materials and their sale is permitted (Article 53). Temporary or permanent permits for the moving of remains out of the country are granted by the INAPL.

National law 25,517 deals with human remains of indigenous people that are held in museums and public and private collections. In Article 3, it states that all scientific research that involves aboriginal communities and their heritage should have the express consent of such communities. Likewise, in Article 1, this law establishes that the human remains of aboriginal populations held in museums and public and private collections should be made available for any reclaim from the communities to which they belong. However, it does not specify the antiquity of the remains and the conditions under which they can be reclaimed, nor does it set out the criteria (geography, ethnicity or kinship) to be considered in carrying out restitution to a specific community.

Even though there are numerous claims made by the communities in Argentina, to date there has only been the restitution of the remains of two persons, held at the Museum of La Plata. In 1994, according to national law 23,940, the remains of Tehuelche Chief Inacayal were buried at Tecka, in the province of Chubut. In 2001, the skull of Mapuche/Ranquel Chief Mariano Rosas, known as Panquitrutz Gner among his relatives, was returned to Leuvucó, in the province of La Pampa (national law 25,276), and was buried in a mausoleum.

In recent years, biological anthropologists and archaeologists have begun to work together with aboriginal communities that are close to areas where human remains are found. A recent example is the rescue and relocation of a burial found in the area of Sacanana, in the province of Chubut (Chiquichano *et al.* 2008). In 2003, during an environmental impact study carried out in Sacanana, a team of archaeologists discovered a funerary structure made of stones (*'chenque'*). In 2005, the Minister of Culture of the government of Chubut and the local indigenous communities decided to carry out the rescue and relocation to the land of one of the communities, with the active participation of all the parties involved. Prior to the relocation, a bioanthropological study of the remains was made, including sampling for radiocarbon dating, stable isotopes analysis and for DNA.

At the National Meeting in 2007, the AABA presented a document stating its position regarding human remains (Declaration of AABA in Relation to the Ethics of the Study of Human Remains 2007). This declaration points out that the scientific study of human remains is of interest to all humanity and cannot be replaced by other scientific approaches or by no science at all. As a result it is necessary to facilitate the restitution of remains of known individuals to communities to which they belong that are claiming them; other cases of reclamations will be the subject of

special discussion and analysis and it is advisable to listen to any claims or opinions relating to a public exhibit of human remains if requested by the communities to which they belong.

METHODS OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

In Argentina, there is no consensus about standards to be applied in the estimation of sex, age and stature. The main difficulty is that there are no local standards developed specifically for aboriginal populations, which is due to the lack of well documented reference samples.

During recent years, in order to unify methodological criteria, most researchers follow the standards proposed by Acsádi and Nemeskéri (1970) and those compiled by Buikstra and Ubelaker (1994). For age estimation, the standards most applied are those of Todd (1920), Brooks and Suchey (1990) and Lovejoy *et al.* (1985).

In order to estimate stature, the standards of Trotter and Gleser (1952; 1958) are followed and, in some cases, those of Fully (1956) and Genovés (1967).

USEFUL CONTACTS

Argentinian Association for Biological Anthropology. Website: www.fcnym.unlp.edu.ar/aabra/
Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense) Website: www.caaf.org/

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NOTE

- 1 Provinces and competent organizations (for more details, see in <http://www.inapl.gov.ar/renycoa/orgaplic.html>): Buenos Aires: Dirección Provincial de Patrimonio Cultural. Catamarca: Secretaría de Cultura, Dirección de Patrimonio Cultural. Chaco: Subsecretaría de Cultura, Comisión Provincial de Patrimonio Cultural y Natural. Chubut: Dirección General de Gestión, Investigación y Patrimonio Cultural. Córdoba: Subgerencia de Patrimonio y Museo. Corrientes: Subsecretaría de Cultura, Dirección de Bellas Artes y Patrimonio Cultural. Entre Ríos: Museo de Ciencias Naturales y Antropológicas 'Prof. Antonio Serrano'. Formosa: Dirección de Cultura. Jujuy: Secretaría de Turismo y Cultura, Coordinación de Patrimonio y Museo. La Pampa: Subsecretaría de Cultura. La Rioja: Secretaría de Cultura, Dirección de Patrimonio Cultural y Museos. Mendoza: Subsecretaría de Cultura, Dirección de Patrimonio Cultural. Misiones: Subsecretaría de Cultura. Neuquén: Secretaría de Estado de Cultura, Dirección General de Patrimonio Cultural. Río Negro: Dirección General de Cultura. Salta: Dirección General de Patrimonio Cultural, Subsecretaría de Cultura. San Juan: Subsecretaría de Cultura. Tucumán: Dirección de Patrimonio Histórico y Antropología. San Luis: Subprograma de Áreas Protegidas, Identidad Paisajística, Parques Urbanos y Forestación. Santa Cruz: Dirección del "Museo Regional Padre Jesus Molina". Santa Fe: Dirección Provincial de Patrimonio. Santiago Del Estero: Subsecretaría