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Dangerous intruder or beneficial influence? The role of the *Institut de Paléontologie Humaine* in the development of prehistoric archaeology in Spain (1900-1936)

¿Peligrosos intrusos o influencia benéfica? El papel del Institut de Paléontologie Humaine en el desarrollo de la arqueología prehistórica en España (1900-1936)

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I examine the role of international scholars in the making of prehistoric research in Spain. I focus on the activities of the Institut de Paléontologie Humaine (IPH), created in Paris in 1910. In the years immediately preceding the First World War, two IPH professors, the French Henri Breuil and the German Hugo Obermaier, did extensive research in the prehistoric archaeological sites and the decorated caves of the Iberian Peninsula. Specialists from all over Europe and the USA travelled to Spain to collaborate with them, and the results of their work were presented internationally. Nevertheless, the professional exchange with their Spanish counterparts soon became fraught with scientific disputes and personal quarrels, when some Spanish scholars accused them of seizing the relics of Spain's national past, describing them as agents of scientific colonialism. Taking this case as reference, I set out to overcome the (false) dichotomy between nationalism and internationalism in the writing of history of archaeology and I seek to explore the influence of the nationalist paradigm on the historiography of prehistoric archaeology in Spain.

KEY WORDS: *History of prehistoric archaeology. Scientific internationalism. Heritage studies. Circulation of knowledge. Professionalization.*

RESUMEN

En este artículo examino el papel de los investigadores internacionales en la construcción de la prehistoria en España. En particular, me centro en las actividades del Institut de Paléontologie Humaine (IPH), creado en París en 1910. En los años previos a la Primera Guerra Mundial, dos de sus profesores, el francés Henri Breuil y el alemán Hugo Obermaier, investigaron extensivamente yacimientos arqueológicos y cuevas decoradas de la Edad de Piedra peninsular. Especialistas venidos de Europa y de Estados Unidos colaboraron con ellos, y los resultados de su trabajo se presentaron a la comunidad científica internacional. Sin embargo, su relación con sus colegas españoles se vio complicada por disputas académicas y conflictos personales, cuando algunos arqueólogos españoles los acusaron de apropiarse las reliquias del pasado nacional, describiendo su trabajo como colonialismo científico. A partir del análisis de este caso este artículo busca superar la (falsa) oposición entre nacionalismo e internacionalismo en la escritura de la historia de la arqueología, así como explorar la influencia del paradigma nacionalista en la historia de la disciplina en España.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Historia de la arqueología prehistórica. Internacionalismo científico. Historia del patrimonio. Circulación del conocimiento. Profesionalización.*

1. Introduction

In autumn 1910, the Institute of Human Paleontology (*Institut de Paléontologie Humaine*; hereafter IPH) was founded in Paris as an international research center for the study of prehistory. Over the following years, the IPH professors launched a large research project to study European Stone Age and prehistoric cave art, mainly in France and Iberian Peninsula. As a consequence, their role on the development of prehistoric research in Spain was paramount. Nevertheless, or perhaps as a result of their prominent role, they were perceived as “intruders” by some Spanish scholars, and particularly by those who were leading the institutionalisation of prehistory in those years.

The scientific activities of the IPH in Spain have been previously analyzed from the point of view of a historiography that describes the development of archaeology in Spain as national in scale and nationalist in spirit. As a matter of fact, since the emergence of the so-called “new” history of archaeology in the 1990s, we have witnessed a remarkable increase in the number of publications devoted to examine the relationship between archaeology and nationalism. Some authors have insisted on the “fact” that archaeology is *essentially* a nationalistic science. For instance, they have argued that “nationalism [...] is deeply embedded in the very concept of archaeology” (Díaz-Andreu & Champion 1996: 3), that there is “a near universality of a relationship between nationalist and the practice of archaeology” (Kohl & Fawcett 1995: 4) and “that *all* archaeological traditions were originally nationalistic, either operating in the context of nationalism by itself, or of this in combination with imperialism and colonialism” (Díaz-Andreu 2007: 11). More recently, a number of scholars have claimed that internationalism *also* played an essential role in the constitution of scientific archaeology since its origins in mid 19th century (Kaeser 2000 and 2010).

In order to avoid the (false) dichotomy between nationalism and internationalism, I argue that the constitution of prehistory as a fully institutionalized discipline can only be explained as a social and cultural history of entangled scientific practices across national borders. As I shall demonstrate, the weaving of transnational networks of scholars and the circulation of scientific theories and collections were as important in the making of prehistory as the affirmation of national ideology. For this reason, I set out to analyze this case study as a *histoire croisée* of prehistory in which I pay particular attention to the role of cultural and scientific transfers at international level (Werner and Zimmermann 2004).

In this context, I seek to contribute to current debates in the historiography of science by showing

how early archaeological research in Europe was determined *both* by the international dimension of science (see Schroeder-Gudehus 1990; Crawford 1992; Somsen 2008; Feuerhahn & Rabault-Feuerhahn 2010) and the active role of archaeologists in the nation-state building process. I explore to what extent the presence of foreign researchers was used by Spanish scholars to demand the establishment of archaeological institutions and the protection of archaeological sites and artefacts (see also Lanzarote Guiral 2012). Additionally, I examine the so-called ‘imperialist archaeology’ in the light of the process of professionalization of the discipline, as well as the instrumental use of nationalist narratives by scientists for the purpose of promoting social and official recognition for their work.

2. International or French? The *Institut de Paléontologie Humaine* in Spain

The origins of the *Institut de Paléontologie Humaine* are deeply linked to the recognition of prehistoric cave art. In 1902 Émile Cartailhac (1845–1922), pronounced his *mea culpa* and recognized the authenticity of the figurative representations in the cave of Altamira near Santander (Cantabria, Spain). The significance of this event is enhanced by the fact that Cartailhac was precisely one of the most outspoken scholars that had denied the authenticity of those representations when the cave was first discovered in 1879. His rejection was supported by the largest sector of the international (and Spanish) scientific community at the time and can be explained as the consequence of a combination of social and scientific factors (Moro Abadía and González Morales 2005).

In turn, the change of opinion expressed by Cartailhac is grounded in the redefinition of prehistory’s social and scientific credentials, and the shift in its general epistemological paradigm after the turn of the century. First, new approaches in the fields of anthropology and history of religion led to a reappraisal of the intellectual and symbolic capacities of “primitive” (and prehistoric) populations (Palacio Pérez 2010). Second, the evolutionist paradigm that had dominated the field of prehistory in the 19th century in France under the leadership of Gabriel de Mortillet (1821–1898), was substituted by a cultural approach, which allowed the assessment of the creative forces of particular human groups and thus the regional variations in archaeological records (Kaeser 2006).

Finally, in the last decades of the 19th century, a new generation of scholars, amongst them some Catholic priests, aimed to avoid what they con-



Figure 1. Henri Breuil, Hugo Obermaier, Hermilio Alcalde del Río and the Prince of Monaco at the entrance of El Castillo Cave. 23 July 1909. © Hugo Obermaier Gesellschaft.

sidered partisan uses of knowledge and strove to transform prehistory into a neutral scientific field, defused from its revolutionary potential (Defrance-Jublot and Hurel 2006). As a result, after 1902 prehistoric cave art became one of the most promising fields within the prehistoric discipline as it allowed the exploration of the mental, social and spiritual skills of the prehistoric populations.

In summer 1902, Cartailhac traveled to Northern Spain to study Altamira cave with a young priest and graduated in Natural Sciences, Henri Breuil (1877–1961), who helped him to draw the prehistoric manifestations of the cave. Loaded with blueprints of Altamira's bison, upon their return to Paris, they attracted the interest of Prince Albert I of Monaco (1848–1922), who subsequently funded the publication of a series of lavishly illustrated publications on the decorated caves in Spain and France (e.g. Cartailhac & Breuil 1906). In 1906 Breuil, who had become assistant professor at the Catholic university of Fribourg (Switzerland) began to excavate in Altamira, with the economic support of the Prince of Monaco and the mediation of the scholarly network of the *Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle*.

The Prince also funded research activities by local scholars such as Hermilio Alcalde del Río (1866–1847), who had discovered some new decorated caves in that province, such as El Castillo (Madarriaga de la Campa 1972: 147–150, see figure 1).

The Prince of Monaco's patronage for prehistory reached its peak in 1908, when Monaco hosted the celebration of the *Congrès International d'Archéologie et Anthropologie Préhistoriques*. Additionally, in 1910, Albert I supported the establishment of the *Institut de Paléontologie Humaine* (IPH) in Paris. The creation of the IPH implied a decisive move towards the institutionalization and professionalization of prehistory in France, carried out by means of centralization in Paris. In this sense, the IPH opposed the large community of French amateur archaeologists, scattered across the whole country and organized since 1904 via the French Prehistoric Society (*Société Préhistorique Française*).

This opposition reflected a division between these two ways of conceiving prehistoric research, on the one hand as an activity regulated by the state, at the service of its goals; on the other as a private

venture, regulated by the rules of free market and private property. This division deepened by the excavation activities of a German-speaking Swiss scholar, Otto Hauser (1874–1932), in the prehistoric sites of Dordogne, France, and his selling of human fossils and prehistoric artifacts, including artworks, to German museums. Alarmed by what they considered to be a looting of the underground “national archives”, as Breuil affirmed (Hurel 2007: 159), French official scholars such as the aforementioned Boule, Cartailhac and Breuil asked their government to pass an Act on the protection of archaeological sites that would curtail the “freedom of excavation” proclaimed by the amateurs of the French Prehistoric Society. Even though the Act was not passed, the creation of the IPH satisfied, at least to some extent, the claims made by official scholars to control the field (White 2002; Hurel 2007a: 149–177).

The IPH enrolled as professors two rising catholic scholars in the field of prehistory, the French Henri Breuil and the German Hugo Obermaier (1877–1946), both of whom were trained naturalists and

Catholic priests (Hurel 2007b). The nomination of Hugo Obermaier provoked the strong reaction of some prehistorians linked to the *Société Préhistorique Française*, who attacked him on the grounds of his nationality and the fact that he was a priest (Hurel 2007: 218).

The new institution aimed at studying the origins of humanity and, more particularly, prehistoric cave art; from the very beginning both professors set out to explore the Spanish territory. Breuil traveled all over the Iberian Peninsula in search of new art stations; his series of publications in *L'Anthropologie* bear witness to these fruitful years of research. However, Breuil's discoveries can only be fully understood as the product of a network of information exchange; Breuil capitalized on the efforts of a large community of local scholars across the whole territory – priests, pharmacists, lawyers – who informed Breuil of new discoveries or even organized prospecting campaigns. Moreover, Breuil hired Juan Cabré (1882–1947), a trained artist and amateur archaeologist, who learnt, alongside Breuil, the tricks of the trade (Ripoll 1994 & 2002; Coye 2006; Hurel 2011).



Figure 2. Hugo Obermaier, Paul Wernert and the local workers at El Castillo Cave in 1913 digging season. © Hugo Obermaier Gesellschaft.

In contrast to Breuil's, Obermaier's activities concentrated on the excavation of El Castillo cave (figure 2), considered at the time as one of the best Palaeolithic sites of Europe, due to its very complete stratigraphic sequence. This site became, in economic and scientific terms, the IPH's largest project in its first years; it attracted a large number of international scholars, who visited the site or collaborated on the digging seasons. Moreover, the work led by Obermaier in El Castillo contributed to the methodological definition of stratigraphic excavation as the prehistorians' method *par excellence* and the measure of professionalism. In analyzing the results of this dig, Obermaier drew on his formation as a geologist in Vienna and his broad knowledge of the prehistory of the continent. His nomination to the IPH confirmed him as one of the leading scholars in the field (Lanzarote Guiral 2011).

3. Defining national heritage: the Spanish reaction

Since their first missions in Spain, the IPH professors encountered a country immersed in an intense process of renovating its scientific and cultural structures, influenced by the consequences of the 1898 colonial crisis. After the military defeat in the Spanish-American War and the subsequent loss of the colonies, Spanish intellectuals had insistently demanded an official effort to redraft scientific policy and orient it towards the regeneration of the country. In this wave of renovation, the idea of *Europeanizing* Spain became central, implying the emulation of other European nations' scientific achievements, and colonial potential (Varela 1999). This policy led to the reform of the university system and to the creation of new research institutions, such as the Board for the Extension of Studies (*Junta para la Ampliación de Estudios*, hereafter JAE) in 1907. This institution started promoting academic exchange by awarding scholarships to study abroad to both students and professors. It quickly developed into a network of research centers for the institutionalization of humanities and sciences (Puig Samper 2007).

The scientific laboratories of the JAE were located in the new premises of the National Museum of Natural Sciences (*Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales*, hereafter MNCN) in Madrid, an institution that was undergoing, since 1900, a deep reform under the directorship of Ignacio Bolívar (1850–1944). Bolívar and other naturalists in the MNCN stressed the link between the historical role that this institution had played in the scientific history of the Hispanic Empire and the role it was

called to play in the project of national awakening. If the idea of social decadence of the Latin Race haunted Spanish intelligentsia, in the cultivation of sciences and in the study of nature, they found a way of regenerating youth (Casado de Otaola 2010).

Similar goals informed the establishment of the first institution devoted to prehistoric research in Spain, the Commission of Prehistoric and Paleontological Research (*Comisión de Investigaciones Prehistóricas y Paleontológicas*, hereafter CIPP), created in Madrid in 1912 under the initiative of Eduardo Hernández-Pacheco (1872–1965). After being nominated chair of geology at the University of Madrid in 1910, Hernández-Pacheco benefited from a JAE scholarship the following year to visit the *Muséum* in Paris when the IPH started its activities. Upon his return, he proposed the creation of an institution within the National Museum of Natural Sciences, devoted to the geological and prehistoric research; Madrid's CIPP mirrored Paris' IPH in its organization, and its research objectives concerned precisely what had attracted the IPH researchers to Spain, the study of archaeological sites and cave art from the Quaternary (Rasilla Vives 2004).

As Breuil had previously done, Hernández-Pacheco associated with powerful patrons to promote the CIPP. A grand amateur of archaeology, Enrique de Aguilera y Gamboa (1845–1922), the Marquis of Cerralbo, was chosen as its president. Cerralbo was an art connoisseur and collector who had developed a passion for prehistoric research in the first decade of the 20th century, but he was also a political figure, being the leader of the Traditionalist Party. This was a strategic move: the marquis was welcomed by the JAE, which was accused of being ideologically dominated by progressive politicians, and his participation evinced that JAE's scientific and patriotic goals as being beyond concrete political choices. Cerralbo also attracted Juan Cabré to the new institution, the same who had collaborated with Breuil since 1909 in the study of the Peninsula's cave art.

Using his position as senator, Cerralbo largely contributed to the drafting of the Archaeological Excavations Act (*Ley de Excavaciones Arqueológicas*), passed in 1911. This legal text defined a protectionist framework for the practice of archaeology by limiting the right of non-Spanish citizens to become owners of their discoveries or to export them. In this manner, the law was a crucial step in the definition of prehistoric and paleontological remains as Spanish national heritage. In order to regulate archaeological practice, the Act created the Central Board of Archaeological Excavations

(*Junta Central de Excavaciones Arqueológicas*), an administrative body entitled to award permits and to allocate funds for excavation (Rasilla Vives and Santamaría Álvarez 2006). Designated vice-president of this Board, Cerralbo established himself as the guardian of Spanish archaeology and agent of institutionalization, roles which he contributed to by using his political power and his aristocratic networks.

The relationship between the IPH and the CIPP was cordial in the beginning and there were some attempts to establish formal links between the two. However, the confrontation finally came about as a dispute between Breuil and Cabré. In August 1913, after a mission in Almería, Breuil was informed that Cabré had bribed one of his prospectors so that he would be informed before the French abbot of any new discovery of a decorated cave. Breuil's rage was accentuated when he found out that Cabré was preparing a book for the CIPP, *El Arte Rupestre en España* (Cabré 1915), on a topic that Breuil considered his own scientific preserve. The scientific pride of being the first publisher of new archaeological discoveries, a matter that affected personal ambitions and professional agendas alike, poisoned the relations between these scholars to the point of the break (Díaz-Andreu 2000).

4. War and peace

The breach between the institutions deepened in the context of the First World War. Due to the outbreak of hostilities, archaeological activities by most international scholars, particularly those of the IPH, ceased or were severely reduced. Breuil was drafted into the French army and had to combine his work as a prehistorian with other activities such as propaganda in favor of the Allies. In turn, Obermaier, a German citizen working in a French institution, lost his position. When the war broke out in summer 1914, he was digging in El Castillo; invited to join the CIPP by Hernández-Pacheco, from then on his career developed within Spanish research structures. The war provided neutral Spain with a chance to catch up with the rest of Europe in scientific terms; as a result, Spanish prehistorians could affirm their leadership in the discipline while fostering the definitive shaping of prehistory as a patriotic discipline. Hernández-Pacheco was the main leader of this movement.

Speaking in front of the Spanish Association for the Advancement of Sciences (*Asociación Española para el Progreso de las Ciencias*) in 1915, Hernández-Pacheco presented the results of the previous years' effort to investigate Spanish prehistory

and palaeontology. In doing so, Hernández-Pacheco established a narrative in which the shortcomings of the 19th century were contrasted against the "re-birth of national science" in the 20th; he claimed Spain's role as protagonist in the field of prehistory on account of the fact that it "constitutes the world's museum of prehistoric art". He did not miss the opportunity to remind the audience that the artifacts discovered in the excavations led by the IPH had been taken to Paris and he accused IPH researchers of conquering the Peninsula for the benefit of French science through the physical and intellectual appropriation of Spain's national past. He concluded on a somewhat positive note, affirming that the presence of "foreign researchers" had triggered a reaction and that Spain "is the archive of the primitive civilizations, which fortunately for Spanish science, belongs to our homeland, and which, as Spaniards and cultivated people, we ought to preserve and study" (Hernández-Pacheco 1915: 149).

In accusing the foreign scholars of stealing national treasures, Hernández-Pacheco confirmed the insertion of prehistoric artifacts into the field of national heritage. In this way he was breaking with the naturalist tradition of exchanging artifacts and collections, a common practice in the field of geology, a break the French official scholars had also done in the context of the Hauser affair. Moreover, in launching this accusation, he was echoing, perhaps unconsciously, a moaning historiography in the fields of art history and classical archaeology that regretted the exportation of artworks from Spain since the beginning of the 19th century. Hernández Pacheco's colleagues at the JAE, the art historians Elías Tormo (1869-1957) and Manuel Gómez Moreno (1870-1970), were studying precisely those "emigrated" artworks, and the case of the selling of the Lady of Elche to the Louvre in 1897 was still recent in the memory.

What Hernández-Pacheco probably did not know was that in 1912 and in 1913 Obermaier had sold a collection of artifacts from El Castillo to the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Obermaier did not just hide this from the Spanish authorities, who had just implemented new heritage legislation, the aforementioned Excavations Act, but also from the IPH, which asked for exclusivity of research results. The secrecy of those transactions meant that the materials were kept in storage, unknown to most specialists, until recently (White 2006).

Hernández Pacheco's ideas were staged in 1921 at the Exhibition of Spanish Prehistoric Art (*Exposición de Arte Prehistórico Español*). The exhibition was organized that year by the CIPP with the support of the aristocratic members of the Spanish



Figure 3. The inauguration of the Exhibition of Spanish Prehistoric Art, 25 May 1921. (From left to right) Eduardo Hernández-Pacheco, Elías Tormo, Hugo Obermaier, King Alphonse XIII, Princes Isabella of Bourbon, María Sanz de Sautuola and Emilio Botín López. The inscription “Aparicio” added on the photography by Obermaier, seems to refer to Francisco Aparicio y Ruiz, minister of Public Instruction, who was also in attendance. © Hugo Obermaier Gesellschaft.

Society of Art Amateurs (*Sociedad española de amigos del arte*), including Elías Tormo (figure 3). The annual exhibition organized by this Society in the premises of the National Library every spring since 1912 was a social event in Madrid that fostered the appraisal of lesser-known kinds of Spanish arts and crafts. Not surprisingly, the exhibition was conceived of by Hernández-Pacheco as a showcase of the achievements of the Spanish CIPP and would only recognize the achievements of IPH scholars with reservations, although the exhibition featured a good number of sketches of cave art representations that had been carried out by Breuil and that were loaned by the institution.

Nevertheless, the collaboration of the CIPP and the IPH at the Exhibition was possible due to the mediation of Obermaier. As a member of the CIPP, he had researched intensively on the geology and prehistory of the Iberian Peninsula during the years of the War. In his book *El Hombre Fósil* (1916), he drew on his previous knowledge and experience in Central Europe and France to insert the prehistory of Spain into that of the rest of the

continent. Even if his relations with Hernández-Pacheco deteriorated to the point that he quit the CIPP, by the end of the First World War Obermaier had developed close ties with aristocratic patrons and members of the Spanish intelligentsia, particularly those who admired the achievements of German science. In 1922 he became the first chair of prehistory in Spain at the University of Madrid. This designation, however, was not achieved without resistance; notably, Hernández-Pacheco, from his chair in the Faculty of Sciences, impeded the creation of a new position in this faculty.

Finally, Obermaier’s chair was established in the Faculty of Humanities, under the name “Primitive history of man” (*Historia Primitiva del Hombre*), confirming the disciplinary shift of prehistory from natural sciences to humanities. Commenting on his recent appointment, Obermaier wrote to Breuil that the JAE had organized a counter-course and accused the chair of anthropology, Manuel Antón y Ferrándiz (1849 - 1929), of affirming that “foreign prehistorians have built in Spain a science of exportation rather than imported by foreigners”.

Ironically, it was Obermaier, a foreign researcher who had indeed smuggled archaeological artifacts out of the country, who became the first university professor of prehistory in the country.

5. Conclusions

The process of the professionalization of prehistory in Europe in the first decades of the 20th century resulted from a complex interplay of scientific, social and economic interests, and was inspired by both the internationalism of the academic world and the opportunities and constraints of the nation-state building process. For this reason, the alleged scientific colonialism performed by European scholars in Spain seems like a narrative construct by contemporary Spanish prehistorians who strove to consolidate their field through means of legal regulations, institutions and the conversion of archaeological artifacts into national heritage items. Furthermore, Spanish scholars transformed prehistoric cave art into a mighty element for national definition; by doing so, they contributed to a historiography that praised painting tradition as one of Spain's most relevant contributions to Western civilization, which compensated for what was perceived of as a less decisive contribution in scientific or philosophical terms.

Going beyond the historiography of the alleged Spanish scientific backwardness, the presence of those international scholars can be better grasped as a consequence of the intensification of the country's opening to international influences, the much desired "Europeanization" of national science. In this context, foreign scholars were perceived as both

eminent scholars to emulate and to attract (as in the case of Obermaier) and competitors to counteract (as in the case of Breuil). The tensions provoked by their presence can be understood as a result of a self-proclaimed national community of prehistorians' strategy to establish their control over the discipline. As opposed to the French case, where amateur archaeologists managed to wrestle official ones and hampered the implementation of the Act on excavations, the professionalization of archaeology in Spain was driven by official initiatives, in which scholars from different social backgrounds collaborated in the name of patriotic regeneration.

The passing of the Archaeological Excavations Act in 1911 and the creation of the CIPP in 1912 are the expression of a desire to regulate archaeological activity and to create scientific structures for its development. Furthermore, those men justified their existence as a defensive effort against foreign science. In this way, Spanish prehistorians used the rhetoric of nationalism to legitimize their discipline in the eyes of society and to consolidate their academic position vis-à-vis the archaeologists that came from abroad. In the aftermath of the colonial crisis, this strategy paid off in a context of hypersensitivity towards what some called "scientific imperialism", as it had also worked in the French case with the Hauser affair in the context of rising anti-Germanic feelings. Finally, singling out foreigners as the antagonists allowed the creation of a group identity that surpassed the social and ideological cleavages between those who constituted the emerging prehistorian community in Spain, whether the noblemen or commoners, official scholars or amateurs, conservative or liberal.

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