

Origin of the Société des Américanistes, Paris

by

David L. Browman
Washington University, St. Louis

Pascal Riviale (1991) produced a two volume dissertation summarizing the work of French scholars involved in anthropology, ethnography, and archaeology in Peru from the beginning of Peruvian independence in 1821 up until World War I. From the commentary, it is clear that not only does this volume trace individual scholars, and institutions involved in archaeologically-related research, but it develops a number of general intellectual themes as well. Riviale has recently (1996) extracted a portion of his dissertation relating to the events leading up to the founding of the Society of Americanists, Paris, in 1895. Because he is focusing in this case on the origin of a specific organization, he concentrates on exegesis of the institutional antecedents from 1821 onward.

In this argument, the most important institution in the first half of the 19th century was the *Museum d'Historie Naturelle de Paris*. This museum printed a guidebook for travellers with instructions for items desired for their collections, and also sponsored individuals as "correspondents". The guidebook, "Instructions générales pour les voyageurs", was first published in 1818; included in the list of items indicated needed for the museum were weapons, tools, clothing, and other artifacts of primitive industries of living and past peoples. Later specific cultures were highlighted; thus the 1860 edition particularly indicated an interest of collecting items relating to the "extinct race" of the "Mound Builders" of North America, as well as those relating to the "high civilizations" of Peru and Mexico. In order to better control collections from the correspondents, the museum established the " in 1842. A number of well-known scholars, such as Brasseur de Bourbourg, Castelnau, Crequi-Montfort, de Perigny, Weiner, etc. were sponsored; in all the section sponsored 13 missions to Peru between 1878 and 1912; 8 missions to Bolivia between 1843 and 1938; 10 missions to Brazil between 1843 and 1938, and 8 missions to Guiana between 1878 and 1912, as well as smaller numbers of missions to Argentina, Chile and other South American countries.

The next major institutional player of importance to this theme was the *Société d'Ethnographie Américaine et Orientale*, founded in 1859, one section of which later evolved into the *Société des Américanistes, Paris*. The roots of this group go back to 1857, when Brasseur de Bourbourg, Leon de Rosny, and Alfred Maury proposed "un societe americaine". They were unable to obtain a critical mass at that point, but their ideas became the basis of the 1859 *Société d'Ethnographie Américaine et Orientale*. By 1863, there was a small *Comité d'Archaéologie Américaine* established within the society, which by 1873 was raised to an independent *Section Américaniste*. The group of scholars in the *Comité* were instrumental in establishing the first International Congress of Americanists, held in Nancy in 1874. The strength of this group was a major factor in the survival of the International Congress of Americanists in its first decade or more. In 1895, the *Comité* officially separated from the *Société d'Ethnographie Américaine et Orientale*, to become the *Société Américaine de France* (later the *Société des Américanistes*). The journal of the Society was modeled after the earlier *Revue d'Ethnographie* (published 1882 to 1889) in which the earlier *Comité* had had a major voice.

Although the Riviale's 1996 article only relates to the founding of the journal, from information referred to in its 49 endnotes it is evident that Riviale's 1991 dissertation will be an absolutely essential resource for anyone interested in the history of French institutions and individuals involved in South American archaeology.

References Cited

Pascal Riviale

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The Kansas Anthropologist Reminiscence Project for Senior Plains Anthropologists

by

Marlin F. Hawley

*Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations,
ask thy father and he will show thee, thy elders, and they will tell thee.
Deuteronomy 32: 7*

For the past six years, *The Kansas Anthropologist* has published an ongoing series of reminiscences or retrospective articles by senior Great Plains archaeologists. The aim of the project is to collect reminiscences from senior anthropologists regarding their experiences in pre- and post-World War II Plains archaeology, biological anthropology, and ethnology. The historian John Lukacs (1966:x) once offered an elegant and concise comment on the value of history, one that I offer here:

I believe that history, as a form of thought, is one of the most precious and perhaps unique rational possessions of Western civilizations. The character of a person may appear best from the reconstruction of the history of his life; the same is true of the character of nations. The very history of a problem may reveal its essential diagnosis. There is no human endeavor that may not be approached and studied profitably through its history.

Fortunately, there hardly needs to be a justification anymore for such a project, as is attested by the recent proliferation of research into the history of archaeology and anthropology on virtually a global scale.

The intention of these retrospective articles is not to explore or diagnose any particular problem but rather to create a mosaic of first person narratives informed by personal experience and illustrated with photos and anecdotes to illuminate the development of Plains anthropology in the 20th Century. To date, the journal has published ten articles in this series:

Carlyle S. Smith Carlyle S. Smith, *KU Years: 1947-1980*. 13(1&2): 58-72 (1992). [This retrospective was the first and was included in an issue of the journal devoted to the history of archaeology at the University of Kansas entitled "Archeology at the University of Kansas, Williston-Eiseley-Spaulding-Smith;" hence, its title. Smith has elsewhere published a similar retrospective, though focused on his pioneering role in historic archaeology; see Smith 1994.]