

“Savages at the End of the World” – Robert Lehmann-Nitsche and his Studies of the Indigenous Peoples of Patagonia, 1898-1919

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ABSTRACT

One of the first research interests of the German anthropologist and ethnologist Robert Lehmann-Nitsche (1872-1938), upon assuming the position as head of the Department of Anthropology at the La Plata Museum in Argentina (*Sección de Antropología del Museo de La Plata*), concerned the indigenous peoples of Patagonia. This article explores Lehmann-Nitsche's anthropological, ethnological, and linguistic studies among the indigenous peoples of Patagonia (Selk'nam, Gennakenk, Mapuche, Aónikenk, Kawésqar, and Yaghan) conducted between 1898 and 1919. These studies included research into pathology, craniology, anthropometry, archaeology, ethnology, linguistics, and mythology. He aimed at contributing to contemporary theories of German scholars on the development and characterization of “natural peoples” (*Naturvölker*), as opposed to “cultural peoples” (*Kulturvölker*), asserting a basic division of humanity.

KEYWORDS

Anthropological Practices, South American Indigenous Peoples, Patagonia, Language Studies, Myths, Robert Lehmann-Nitsche (1872-1938), Argentina, Museo de La Plata.

If we ... accept the principle that the modern barbarian world has preserved to a fair degree the culture of humanity's adolescence, we may legitimately go a step farther and look to the modern savage world for some clue to the culture of humanity's childhood.

Cooper, 1917: vi

Since the early sixteenth century, Patagonia has been linked, in the European imaginary, to a region where a race of giants inhabited the distant and uncharted southern borders of the Spanish empire¹ (Fig. 1). Despite the increase of geographic, cartographic, and ethnographic knowledge, this narrative persisted until the second half of the nineteenth century. From then on, “Patagonian giants” were also inserted into anthropological evolutionary accounts. In the case of German ethnology, they were classified along with Africans, Pacific Islanders, and other indigenous peoples of the Americas, as “natural peoples” (*Naturvölker*), who differed from “cultural peoples” (*Kulturvölker*). In this theoretical approach, that distinction constituted a basic division of humanity (Waitz, 1859).

“Natural peoples” supposedly lacked history and were separated from narratives of Western civilization; being attributed a greater proximity to nature. Supposedly isolated from the world around them and evolution in general, these groups seemed promising in order to reach back deeper in time; offering a source of information for understanding the evolutionary path of European populations and human history’s underpinnings (Gould, 1988; Rudwick, 2014; Stocking Jr., 1987; Wolf, 2010).

In the last third of the nineteenth century, innovations and technological modifications in the fields of communication and transport contributed to an increasingly “networked” pattern of politics, economics, and social life, thereby endangering the very indigenous peoples that ethnology sought to investigate. Scholars studying them believed in their imminent and inevitable extinction (Penny, 2002; Zimmerman, 2001). By the 1860s, Adolf Bastian (1826-1905), a German physician, world traveler, and director of the Royal Museum of Ethnology in Berlin, had begun

1 In 1523, Maximilianus Transylvanus (1490-1538) published the first descriptions of Patagonian indigenous people, which were characterized as being of “extraordinary height [...] clothed in the skins of wild beasts and seemed darker” (Pigafetta, 1874: 190).

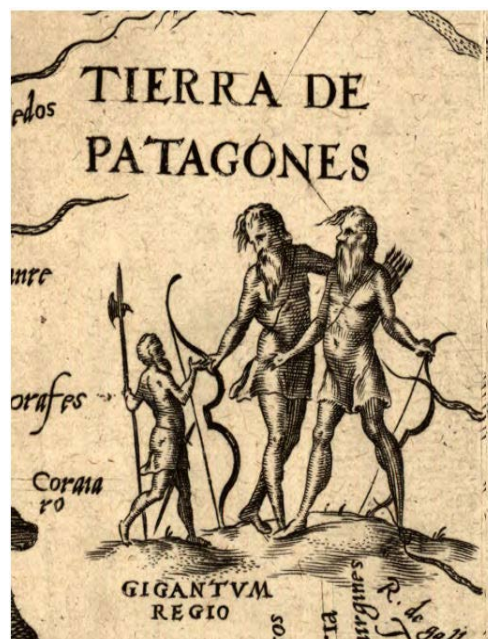


Figure 1
“Gigantic Regio” (Region of Giants). Detail from the 1562 Map of America by Diego Gutiérrez and Hieronymus Cock. Source: Gutiérrez and Cock (1562)

his large-scale empirical project of obtaining materials from a range of rapidly vanishing “natural peoples” in Africa, Australia, and South America. To this end, he had established extensive international networks of collection, collaboration, and exchange in order to obtain ethnographic and osteological material. Bastian, like other scholars, affirmed that the elements of contemporary peoples’ material culture and the material traces of earlier peoples were fundamental in understanding the evolution and development of humankind in a direct and “objective” way.



Figure 2
Robert Lehmann-Nitsche (ca. 1899)
Source: Lehmann-Nitsche legacy, Ibero-American Institute (Berlin)

Robert Lehmann-Nitsche’s (1872-1938) studies of the inhabitants of Patagonia were developed within this international scientific context (Fig. 2). These studies included the establishment of multiple registers of physical, anatomical, and ethnological characteristics in order to salvage what he believed were the essential elements of these rapidly vanishing “natural peoples.”

Arriving in Argentina on 10 July 1897, Lehmann-Nitsche assumed the position as the head of the Department of Anthropology (*Sección de Antropología*) of the Museo de La Plata in Buenos Aires, which had been left vacant by the Dutch anthropologist Herman ten Kate (1858-1931). Lehmann-Nitsche had studied in Freiburg, Berlin, and Munich, where he obtained two doctorates at the Ludwig-Maximilian-University, the first in natural sciences (1894) and the second in medicine (1897). Once settled in La Plata, he soon began forging ties with local and foreign scholars, particularly with the Germans, which gave him access to instrumental and bibliographical resources for his research. In this matter, the German community residing in Argentina was also crucial as its members provided him with an important logistical and material infrastructure needed for his anthropological expeditions undertaken between 1900 and 1926. His research interests included folklore, linguistics, archaeology, paleoanthropology, ethnology, and mythology.

In 1903, he taught the first Argentinean university courses in physical anthropology at the Universidad de Buenos Aires. With his appointment as the university’s Professor of Anthropology in 1905, the first South American university professorship in physical anthropology was created. In 1906, he also began to teach anthropology at the Universidad de La Plata. At both universities, he supervised several doctoral dissertations related to physical anthropology and paleoanthropology.

He was a member of numerous scientific societies in Argentina, France and Germany. After his retirement in 1930, he returned to Berlin to work as a lecturer for South American cultures (*Kulturen Südamerikas*) at the University of Berlin until his death in 1938.

Lehmann-Nitsche's original idea had been to stay in Argentina for no longer than six years, a time span he considered sufficient in order to investigate the important Museo de La Plata's osteological collections and to write a series of monographs on them. His aim was to gain academic visibility in order to obtain a workplace in the competitive German scientific context (Ballesterio, 2014).² However, he stayed in the country much longer and dedicated more than 20 years in the study of Patagonia's indigenous peoples, focusing on subjects ranging from paleoanthropology to linguistics.

TREPANNED SKULLS AND ILL BONES

Lehmann-Nitsche's first research on Patagonia's indigenous peoples should be understood in the light of the research opportunities that catered to his personal needs. The "access" to important osteological collections was seen as an opportunity to establish a reputation among scholars doing research on the indigenous peoples of southern Argentina. For scholars, skeletal remains, in comparison to results provided by "subjective" written sources, were supposedly more impartial, objective, and accurate when studying humankind's history and evolution (Daston and Galison, 2010; Fabian, 1983; Lucas, 2005).³ Therefore, scholar's demands for skeletal remains increased significantly during the second half of the 19th century. In a competitive global market, where European institutions conducted an aggressive policy of acquisition,⁴ Lehmann-Nitsche took advantage of his unhindered and exclusive access to the Museo de La Plata's osteological collections.

Following the subject developed in his second doctoral thesis, Lehmann-Nitsche began a comparative study of racial pathology and craniology (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1904a).⁵ In the beginning, he focused on injuries and surgical interventions, such as trepanations and perforations, remarking that the Patagonian skulls provided irrefutable evidence of the antiquity of surgical interventions in South America's southern region (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1898b; 1902a). Based on the cranial characteristics and the visible marks, he established ethnographic parallels between the operative and post-operative processes of Neolithic populations in Europe and contemporary indigenous peoples from South America and other so-called "primitive" peoples, such as the "Aboriginal Tasmanians" and the "Torres Strait Islanders" (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1898b; 1916a).

2 This career plan was influenced by the Swiss anthropologist Rudolf Martin (1864-1925), who negotiated Lehmann-Nitsche's appointment as head of the department of anthropology of the Museo de La Plata with its director, the Argentinian Francisco Moreno (1852-1919). Martin assured Lehmann-Nitsche that La Plata's Museum was merely a repository of anthropological collections with no scientific production. According to him, these valuable collections were wasted due to the lack of a professional anthropologist. With the exception of ten Kate's work, Martin assured Lehmann-Nitsche that the scientific results produced at the Museo de La Plata were poor and inconsequential (Martin, 1896).

3 For Lehmann-Nitsche, skeletal remains provided crucial information when it was useless to "dig in written history's old books" (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1898a: 28). Unless specified otherwise, all translations from German, French and Spanish are mine.

4 In his research on the supposed existence of pre-Columbian leprosy in America, the American physician Albert Ashmead (1850-1911) pointed out "The Leipzig authorities when collecting specimens even killed a Guayaquí Indian in South America to obtain his skull!" (Ashmead, 1903: 383).

5 To this end, he assembled a "pathological cabinet" with 300 skulls, 19 skeletons, and almost 2.000 isolated bones from Patagonia and began writing a series of brief essays on racial pathology and craniology. According to ten Kate (1897), these skeletal remains were ideal if one intended to undertake

Lehmann-Nitsche also studied the lesions present in the long bones of the arms and legs, formulating hypotheses about the probable pre-Columbian existence of osteological infectious diseases and the chronic joint disease found in contemporary Patagonia's indigenous people.⁶ For him, the observable pathological conditions resulted directly from the nomadic lifestyle of the indigenous peoples of Patagonia. Observing how Patagonia's indigenous people affected with chronic joint disease could endure their nomadic lifestyle, he stated that "primitive peoples, like prehistoric peoples, were clearly characterized by a great resistance to infection and a less pronounced sensitivity to pain than modern civilized peoples" (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1902b: 29).

Lehmann-Nitsche noted that the structural, economic, and institutional limitations of being a scholar in Argentina restricted his research. In order to resolve these unsatisfactory local working conditions, he implemented different strategies. One strategy was to travel to Europe in order to acquire anthropological instruments and specialized literature,⁷ visit institutions and museums, and attend scientific congresses. There he had the opportunity to discuss his findings and compare them with the views of other German scholars (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1900b; 1902b; 1904c).⁸ Another strategy was to develop a collaborative network with other scholars involved in craniological studies.⁹

INDIGENOUS BODIES

Together with the studies on osteology, Lehmann-Nitsche studied living indigenous people of Patagonia. In 1898, he measured and photographed two indigenous families being exhibited at the National Industrial Exhibition in Buenos Aires; he also gathered a vocabulary and made drawings of them.¹⁰ Similar studies were conducted at the Museo de La Plata's anthropological laboratory in 1905 on a group of 7 individuals returning from being exhibited at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition (United States). On this occasion, he made one of the first phonographic recordings of South American indigenous music (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1908; 1916a).¹¹

This research allows us to reflect on the nature of "fieldwork" in the early twentieth century. The "field" was not a physically defined place; rather an abstract, timeless, and transitory space constituted through specific practices, technologies, and actors (Latour and Woolgar, 1986; Lynch, 1991). In both circumstances, the physical space in which the studies were conducted was irrelevant to Lehmann-Nitsche, as for him the priority consisted in approaching a study object that, as he pointed out, was becoming extinct: "Our South American tribes are destined to disappear, so we need to take urgent action and save what still exists" (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1899: 124).

an objective and scientifically important anthropological research in South America, a view also propounded by one of the founders of French physical anthropology, the French physician Paul Broca (1824-1880).

6 Specifically he studied the occurrence of leprosy, syphilis, lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, rickets, avascular necrosis, periostitis and osteitis. The results were compared with those known from contemporary European populations.

7 Lehmann-Nitsche remarked prior to his first journey to Europe in 1900 that his main objective of this trip was to "carry out osteological studies in specialized laboratories, which cannot be done in Argentina due to the lack of equipment and specialized instruments." Therefore, he bought new anthropometric instruments and photographic equipment in order to overcome "deficient instruments" used during his first research studies (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1900: 3; 1901b: 4).

8 In 1900, he brought 5 skulls and 4 jaws with artificial injuries to be exhibited in meetings of the Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology, and Prehistory; they were subsequently examined by the German physicians Rudolf Virchow (1821-1902) and Curt Strauch (1868-1931). In 1904, he exhibited purportedly syphilitic long bones in the International Congress of Americanists meeting in Stuttgart (Germany).

9 One example was the collaboration with the German palaeontologist Hermann von Ihering (1850-1930) in order to develop a

Together with the studies carried out in urban spaces, Lehmann-Nitsche conducted fieldwork in the southern part of Argentina and Chile in 1902, carrying out studies in places such as mission stations, police posts, and private landholdings, where a significant number of indigenous people were concentrated. These places provided Lehmann-Nitsche with physical spaces where he could carry out his research, procure food, and find rest. The possibility of access to these places also reveals the impact of the shared sociability of scholars, but also of chance. Prior to travelling the Tierra del Fuego region, Lehmann-Nitsche received several letters from German philologist Rudolf Lenz (1863-1938), who was living in Chile since 1899, providing him with instructions on how to travel in Chile and a list of members of the German community that could lodge him. Similarly, access to the police stations spread throughout Tierra del Fuego was made possible by Eduardo Holmberg, responsible for an exploratory expedition commissioned by the Argentinean Agriculture Department, whom Lehmann-Nitsche coincidentally met on board the steamboat to Tierra del Fuego (Ballesterro, 2014).

Working in remote locations, far from the closed space of the laboratory and the commodity of the academy, required the collaboration of individuals with little or no academic training in anthropological observation. Lehmann-Nitsche received help by local police officers and the Salesian missionaries from the Misión Salesiana de la Candelaria (Fig. 3 and 4). They actively helped him by making notes for his linguistic and anthropometric studies, taking photos of indigenous persons, and subsequently offering them to him (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1902). These “invisible technicians,” generally omitted from publications and official reports, played an active role and were often indispensable in the creation of scientific knowledge (Shapin, 1989).

craniological cartography of South American's indigenous peoples (von Ihering, 1903; 1910). Unfortunately, like in other cases, this cooperation was restricted solely to private correspondence and never materialized in any concrete project.

10 The families brought by Lieutenant Colonel Pedro Godoy (1858–1899), governor of Tierra del Fuego, consisted of two couples, the men aged 18 and 22, the women 20 and 16, and two children aged 8 years and 6 months.

11 Lehmann-Nitsche's main objective was to collaborate with the musical cartography projects promoted by the Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv.



Figure 3
Patagonians in the Tierra del Fuego police station (1902)
Source: Lehmann-Nitsche's legacy, Ibero-American Institute (Berlin)

Towards the first decade of the twentieth century the influence of physical anthropology and the anatomical construction of “races” based on measurements of body parts, especially the skull and the long bones, declined. This led to an increasing interest among scholars in collecting myths, vocabulary and phonographic recordings. According to Lehmann-Nitsche it was necessary to complement biological studies with other research that could penetrate indigenous peoples’ psyche. In this regard, throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century, he published extensively on linguistics and mythology, synthesizing in this way a vast body of data gathered from 1897 on.



Figure 4
Patagonians in the Salesian mission of Tierra del Fuego (1902)
Source: Lehmann-Nitsche’ legacy, Ibero-American Institute (Berlin)

ARIADNE’S THREAD

By 1915, Lehmann-Nitsche described the situation of linguistic studies in Argentina as formless and chaotic. Meanwhile, documenting and analyzing indigenous peoples’ languages constituted a consistent and continuous part of his research during his stay in Argentina. His linguistic studies covered a number of subjects: the gathering of vocabularies, the determination of linguistic correlations between Patagonian indigenous peoples and other South American regions, the publication of early linguistic reference sources, and finally the preparation of a schematized linguistic cartography of Patagonia.

As with his craniological and anthropometric studies, Lehmann-Nitsche benefited from a preexisting large body of data gathered throughout the second half of the nineteenth century by scholars, missionaries and military. Previous comparative studies were confined to the relations between languages, emphasizing similarities and differences between them. By contrast, Lehmann-Nitsche proposed to considering the linguistic classification as “Ariadne’s thread” for the ethnographic classification of American indigenous peoples (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1918: 324). In this sense, he pointed out that the linguistic approach “has proven its effectiveness in cataloging the vast number of indigenous peoples” (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1922a: 21). As he claimed, anthropology was not only physical anthropology; it could not and should not be limited to the biological study of humankind (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1904b).

The opening up of the Spanish and Portuguese domains in South America,

at the beginning of the nineteenth century, coincided with the start of European scientific expeditions set in order to remedy the general lack of knowledge about the “New World.” Scholar-travelers such as the German Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859), Carl Friedrich Phillipp von Martius (1794-1868) or the French Alcide d’Orbigny (1802-1857) documented a large number of unknown indigenous languages, contributing to the initial assessment of linguistic diversity in South America.¹² Based on this vast collection, scholars in France, the United States, and Germany promoted an ethnolinguistic shift in regards to the study and classification of South American indigenous peoples during the last decades of the nineteenth century (Campbell and Grondona, 2012).

Works such as *The American Race* (1891) by the American ethnologist Daniel Brinton (1837-1899) or *Principes et dictionnaire de la langue Yuracaré* (1893) by the French linguist Lucien Adam (1833-1918) proposed the first taxonomic classification of South American indigenous languages. For both of them, previous geographical, phenotypical and racial classifications had not yet produced convincing scientific results; only a linguistic approach could remedy this situation (Adam, 1893; Brinton, 1891). Referring to these works, the Argentinian linguist Samuel Lafone Quevedo (1835-1920) stated, “the philological derivation correlates with the results of archaeology, craniology, anthropology, geology, and common sense” (Lafone Quevedo, 1893: 127).

Lafone Quevedo was one of the most active Argentinian scholars in the systematic study of Argentinian indigenous languages. Like Lehmann-Nitsche, he was a strong critic of previous work conducted by individuals without an appropriate academic background. Between 1896 and 1915, he published vocabularies and original manuscripts from the region of Gran Chaco (Argentina), which he complemented with studies realized by him. With auspicious eyes, Lafone Quevedo saw what he considered as the beginning of linguistic studies in Argentina; which would not only contribute to the development of ethnology and anthropology at a local level but would also support linguistic studies carried out in Europe.¹³

If Brinton and Adam were the main influences on Lafone Quevedo’s linguistic studies, for Lehmann-Nitsche’s studies it was the work of German ethnologists such as Paul Ehrenreich (1855-1914), Karl von den Steinen (1855-1929), Franz Boas (1858-1942), Konrad Theodor Preuss (1869-1938), Theodor Koch-Grünberg (1872-1924), and Rudolf Lenz (1863-1938). Using slightly different approaches, these scholars questioned the racial classification based exclusively on morphological or osteological features by advocating a philology-based methodology, which would lead them to establish interethnic relations and migration patterns.

Giving special importance to the geographical distribution of cultural elements, these scholars considered that anthropology should adopt a linguistic approach in order to increase knowledge about South American indigenous

12 Von Humboldt registered important ethnographic data and vocabulary lists of the languages spoken in the northern Caribbean, Northwestern South America, and the Middle Andes. Von Martius published an extensive vocabulary from 72 ethnic groups of the Amazonia region collected by the Austrian naturalist Johann Natterer (1787-1843). D’Orbigny collected languages from the Southern part of South America and Southern Brazil.

13 In this sense Lafone Quevedo pointed out, “The Europeans complain about the lack of data on South American languages... Here then, we offer them the first part of data...to fill the void” (Lafone Quevedo, 1892: 373-374).

peoples. Reflecting on their classification, Ehrenreich pointed out: “A reasonable orientation, in view of the confusion caused by the many small tribes, can only be made with a reliable linguistic foundation” (Ehrenreich, 1904: 42). A few years before, Lafone Quevedo had stated, “common lexical roots could help explain craniological community” (Lafone Quevedo, 1893: 127). As Lehmann-Nitsche would later mention, the similarity or difference in some physical characteristics could not determine belonging to a “race,” because no single data on its own, either craniological or ethnological, provided objective criteria for such an affiliation. Physical, ethnological and geographical data should be considered together in order to establish membership of an ethnic group (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1899).

According to Ehrenreich, if the future of anthropology rested on linguistic studies, these were subject to work carried out by German scholars in the Americas. In this sense, he affirmed: “Even here abroad, if German scholars are in the frontline, then we can expect that Germany will prevail over the United States as the leader in this interesting field of ethnology” (Ehrenreich, 1904: 75). Despite this statement, Ehrenreich called to advance these studies, since to him, South America was still a “terra incognita” from a linguistic point of view (Ehrenreich, 1904: 75). The work of von den Steinen, Boas, Preuss, Koch-Grünberg, Lenz, and Ehrenreich helped clarify methodological considerations, as well as defined instrumental resources, strategies, and spaces where fieldwork should be conducted. These aspects of scientific practice were echoed by Lehmann-Nitsche, guiding his linguistic studies (Ballesterro, 2014).

Considering the above-mentioned, Lehmann-Nitsche’s documentation practice of the languages of Patagonian indigenous peoples differed from previous researches carried out by Daniel Brinton, Lucien Adam or Lafone Quevedo, among others, in the way that he gave equal importance to the analysis of phonetics and grammar while seeking assistance from bilingual indigenous informants to ensure that the gathered linguistic data and their phonetic transcriptions were correct. In addition, he conducted surveys, noted down specific information with respect to the context of collecting, cataloged the interaction time span with the indigenous, and the use of unpublished missionary, military, and governmental sources.

COMPILING LANGUAGE SPECIMENS

Shortly after arriving to the region, Lehmann-Nitsche began the linguistic registration process. During the previously mentioned National Industrial Exhibition in Buenos Aires of 1898, he had compiled a vocabulary dictated by two Selk’nam, called Tschoskiai and Kíótomen and the translator who had accompanied them.¹⁴ A year later, he transcribed two short stories from a young Mapuche

14 The vocabulary lists included body parts, elements and nature, utensils, animals, numbers, and pronouns (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1898).

named Lemudeu, who worked as a firefighter in the city of La Plata.

These primary vocabulary lists did not comprise a coherent and systematic plan of study, but like his craniological and anthropometric studies were shaped by his belief in the inevitable physical extinction of indigenous peoples. Lehmann-Nitsche remarked, “The professional philologists, unfortunately, do not appreciate the scientific value of the systematic study of primitive languages that are still spoken today. Especially in South America, precious material disappears every day without philologists documenting it, with only a few exceptions such as Lenz, von den Steinen, Ehrenreich, Lafone Quevedo, etc.” (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1905: 31). Faced with this inexorable reality, Lehmann-Nitsche began with an exhaustive data collection in La Plata

city. This had strategic value for accessing his subject, as La Plata was the epicenter for displaced indigenous people resulting from military campaigns and the subsequent annexation of the Patagonia region.

Very quickly, Lehmann-Nitsche established a network of Mapuche informants in La Plata city (Fig. 5). Some of them, such as Lemudeu, Katrúlaf and Nahuelpi, were important nodes of information, as they facilitated Lehmann-Nitsche’s access to the local Mapuche community and enabled meeting other informants. This collaboration network allows us to single out a few essential points about the role each participant played.

Indigenous living in urban spaces greatly facilitated the scholars’ fieldwork, as they were readily available and there was no need to travel to indigenous communities in the hinterland. At the same time, indigenous informants took an active part in the scholars’ research, using their “indigeneity” in exchange for financial remuneration or special favors by the scholars. Lehmann-Nitsche’s indigenous informants corrected his transcriptions and interviewed other indigenous people in order to gather more information, requesting payment for the

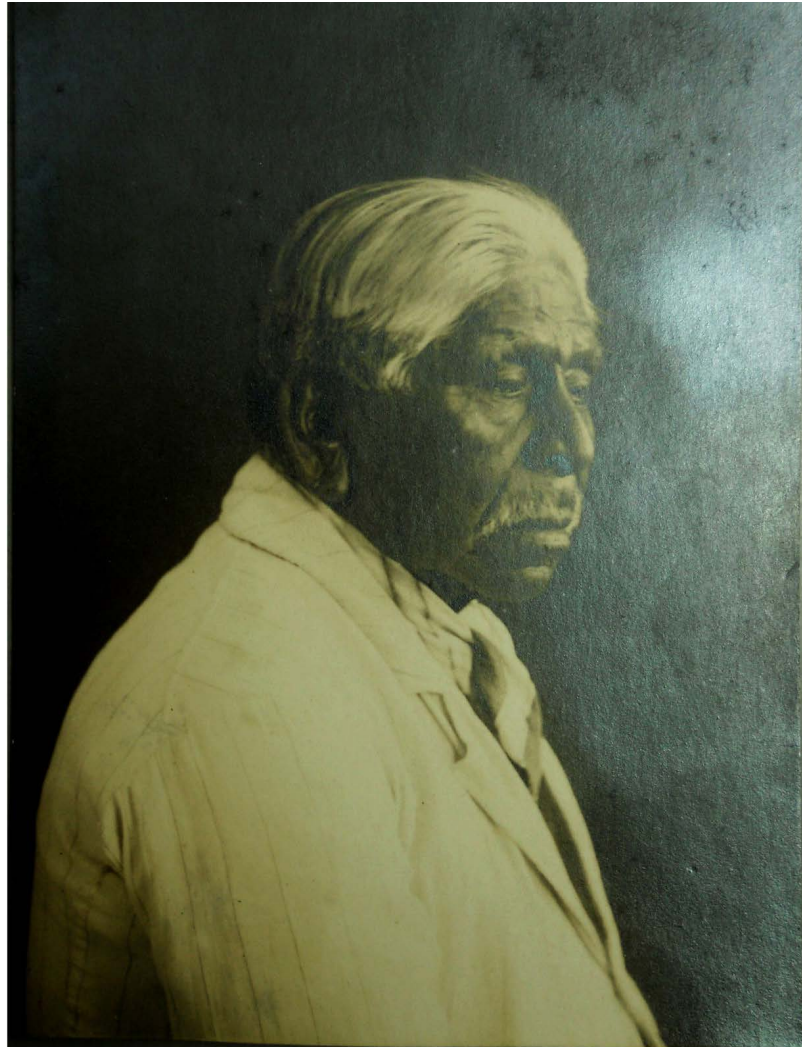


Figure 4
Patagonians in the Salesian mission of Tierra del Fuego (1902)
Source: Lehmann-Nitsche’s legacy, Ibero-American Institute (Berlin)

hours worked (González, 1902).

In other cases, they benefited from Lehmann-Nitsche's social status as a professor and a scholar in order to intergrate into the Argentinean society of the twentieth century. For example, on his return to the province of Neuquén, Nahuelpi asked Lehmann-Nitsche to recommend him to be reintegrated into the local army battalion. Similarly, in 1908, Katrülaf, who was about to be released from prison, requested 10 or 12 pesos from Lehmann-Nitsche. As Katrülaf remarked, he was going to be released from jail, a situation that left him alone, far away from home, and with no financial compensation (Castro, 1908; González, n.d.).

Between 1899 and 1907, Lehmann-Nitsche gathered large amounts of Mapuche linguistic material, including 2,410 pages organized in a manuscript entitled *Textos Araucanos*, which was never published.¹⁵ For this manuscript, he followed the research protocol described in Lenz's *Estudios Araucanos*, which specified the selection of informants, the transcription of oral texts, the implementation of recording instruments, and related procedures.¹⁶ Following this protocol, he intended to ensure, on the one hand, the standardization of the collected linguistic data in order to compare them; while on the other, to gather control elements for his anthropometric and visual data. Part of the collected linguistic data was systematized and analyzed by Lehmann-Nitsche in a series of articles discussing the alleged existence of Quaternary animals. Thanks to these collected stories, he identified them as otters. Another article discussed the relationship between the stories mentioned above, the European folkloric narrative about animals, and Hansel and Gretel¹⁷ (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1902d; 1905).

FIELDWORK IN BUENOS AIRES AND NORTHERN PATAGONIA

One of the most important benefits that Lehmann-Nitsche obtained from working with indigenous people in urban spaces was the possibility of expanding this collaboration network to include friends, acquaintances, and family members of the network's participants living in provincial territories. This dynamic multi-agent structure underpinned the success of Lehmann-Nitsche's fieldwork in the Northern part of the province of Buenos Aires and in Northern Patagonia between 1911 and 1925, offering him a vast body of information; especially, in spaces that were used as strategic logistical centers to rest, obtain supplies, and process the collected data.

The selection of places where fieldwork was conducted was not accidental. They corresponded to geographical spaces included in previous linguistic studies conducted by "armchair scholars", as well as in compilations made by eighteenth and nineteenth-century travelers.¹⁸ Hence, through data collected in situ, Lehmann-Nitsche aimed to ascertain the validity and empirical value of

15 Throughout 1901 and 1902, Lehmann-Nitsche worked intensively with Nahuelpi, Katrülaf, and Kolüngür in La Plata city. Between 1906 and 1907, he worked with Juan Salva Marinau and Antonio Coron in the cities of La Plata and Buenos Aires. The "Textos Araucanos" were organized in three volumes: Volume 1: Dialogues in Mapuche dialect. Stories about Animals. Mythical stories. Short stories; Volume 2: Historical Stories; Volume 3: Songs.

16 Contact with Lenz began in 1897. Since that time, they established a fluid correspondence exchange, in which Lenz recommended literature about linguistic studies to Lehmann-Nitsche and helped him in contacting other scholars researching the same subjects (Ballestero, 2014).

17 Lehmann-Nitsche compared the stories he collected with the following European fairy tales: The Rabbit and the Hedgehog (*Der Hase und der Igel*), Henry the Wolf and his Lions (*Heinrich dem Wolfen und seinem Löwen*), Hansel and Gretel (*Hänsel und Gretel*), and the Town Musicians of Bremen (*Die Bremer Stadtmusikanten*).

18 He conducted fieldwork in Los Toldos, Antonio Oeste, Ramos Mexía, Aguada Cecilio, Valcheta, General Conesa, Carmen de Patagones, Pringles, Sauce Blanco, Valcheta, Primera Angostura, Segunda Angostura, Tapilique, Aguada Cecilio, Colonia Frías, and Bariloche (Ballestero, 2014).

such preliminary sources in the field as well as to formulate new hypotheses and carry out analyses against the historical-comparative approach based only on written sources.

In particular, he referred to the tradition established by the English Jesuit missionary Thomas Falkner (1707-1784) in his work *A Description of Patagonia and the adjoining parts of South America, with a grammar and a short vocabulary, and some particulars relating to Falkland's Islands* (1774). In 1915, during his first fieldwork in the province of Rio Negro, Lehmann-Nitsche pointed out that it “was necessary to consult Falkner’s book in situ. I have a copy, as I will travel next year, for the same purpose, from Carmen de Patagones to Colonia Frias, being able to consult Puelches and Araucanos about many details of Falkner’s book, which were doubtful and important at the same time” (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1922a: 12).

For gathering linguistic data, Lehmann-Nitsche used the 1892 *Handbuch zur Aufnahme fremder Sprachen* (Handbook to Collect Foreign Language Specimens) by the German linguist Hans von der Gabelentz (1840-1893). Primarily intended to be used by colonial officials, missionaries, and individuals dealing with indigenous languages, this handbook included a number of technical and methodological guidelines on how to interact with the informants, how to gather and structure the linguistic data into a series of grammatical categories, and how to analyze them.¹⁹ The use of this handbook by Lehmann-Nitsche corresponded to his methodological and strategic premises. On the one hand, it gave coherence and continuity to the collection process, since Lehmann-Nitsche had previously used this handbook to collect vocabularies and short texts amongst the Selk’nam (1898) and Aónikenk (1903). On the other, it enabled him to order, analyze, and classify information from several sources, which regardless of the collection methods, were rendered into uniform, standard, and comparable data.

During his series of fieldwork periods, Lehmann-Nitsche acquired an important compendium of linguistic elements, which were integrated in and articulated with those obtained in the urban areas of La Plata and Buenos Aires between 1917 and 1927; as well as from glossaries compiled by other scholars and from unpublished manuscripts provided through private correspondence. Based on this synthesis, Lehmann-Nitsche was able to draw a general linguistic map of Patagonia’s indigenous peoples, which he also conceived as a potentially viable instrument used to elucidate ethnical and archaeological subjects.

Studying a group of indigenous women in Tierra del Fuego, Lehmann-Nitsche stressed that their physical similarity made it difficult to determine their ethnological and regional identity based only on anthropometric and morphological characteristics. Nevertheless, using the complementarity of their linguistic differences as a criterion for classification, he concluded that one of them was Yaghan, two were Kawésqar, and four were Selk’nam (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1916a;

19 The grammatical categories were: pronouns, numbers, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions and verbs (Gabelentz, 1892).

1916b; 1916c). Similarly, alleging the supposed inherent and structural integrity of the language over time, Lehmann-Nitsche used the collected linguistic data as empirical evidence to address the core issue of the origins, relations, and interethnic correlation of archaeological objects such as engraved axes, labial buttons, and auricular discs²⁰ (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1909a; 1909b; 1916d; 1916e).

In his general conclusions on Patagonia's linguistic cartography, Lehmann-Nitsche stated that the fact that the ethnic classification of South American indigenous peoples was primarily based on geographical particularities, a tradition he traced back to Falkner's work from the eighteenth century, was one of the problems of South America's anthropology. According to him, the main problem was the artificiality of geographical boundaries, which moreover, presented the increasing tendency to change over time, other than the criterion of language. In this sense, he proposed to use gloss-ethnic²¹ classification to bring together the regional languages of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego under the name "Tshon," an indigenous word meaning "human and people."

Based on this nominal syntagma, he determined geographical/ethnical regions according to specific linguistic particularities,²² rejecting the linguistic stock proposed by Daniel Brinton and the Canadian anthropologist Alexander Chamberlain (1865-1914). Brinton suggested three linguistic stocks for Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego: "Alikuluf," "Ona," and "Yahgan," which were composed of 12 indigenous dialects.²³ On his part, Chamberlain proposed the inclusion of various indigenous dialects spoken from the province of Rio Negro to the Straits of Magellan in a single linguistic stock he named "Tsonekan or Tehuelchean" (Chamberlain, 1911).

For Lehmann-Nitsche, the classificatory errors committed by Brinton and Chamberlain resulted from the exclusive use of secondary data sources for their work. Lehmann-Nitsche remarked that many of these sources were vocabularies collected by individuals without any academic training and therefore comprised of numerous misconceptions and misunderstandings. In this sense, he drew attention to the work written by armchair scholars while advocating for increased fieldwork (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1913). Finally, Lehmann-Nitsche suggested distinguishing Falkner's "Puelche people" from the outer northwestern Patagonian territories into 4 linguistic groups²⁴ (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1922a; 1925). This led him to propose the existence of the "Het linguistic group," an indigenous word meaning "people," to which he devoted several publications between 1918 and 1930 (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1918; 1922a; 1925; 1930a).

According to Lehmann-Nitsche, Falkner's work and other colonial manuscripts were sufficient authoritative evidence required to make such a proposal. Decades later, it was found that the vocabulary collected by Falkner, on which Lehmann-Nitsche's proposal relied, could be considered Mapuche or Tehuelche

20 Lehmann-Nitsche characterized Patagonian archaeological culture as "poor" because of the local degeneration and the incipient level of local art. These series of studies were principally based on data and archaeological material provided by private collectors.

21 The term "gloss-ethnic" refers to the practice of inferring that all members of an ethnic group share a common set of culture-related characteristics, such as language.

22 Lehmann-Nitsche divided Patagonia into the following areas: North (Tehuelche), South (Aónikenk), and southwest (Tä'nöshun). Tierra del Fuego was divided according to the traditional way of life of the indigenous into "land people" and "canoeist people". The former were divided into the following areas: Center (Selk'nam) and Southeast (Mánekenk). In the case of the latter, the areas were South (Yaghan) and Southwest (Kawésqar) (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1913; 1921).

23 The Alikuluf linguistic stock contained the following dialect: Alikulufs and Karaikas. The Ona linguistic stock: Onas, Huemuls, Iress, Oensmen, Pescheress, and Yacanas. The Yahgan linguistic stock: Kennekas, Takanikas, Yahgans, and Yapoos (Brinton, 1891).

24 The four linguistic groups were: 1) Che language (Moluche, Puelche, and Araucanians people), 2) Künnü language (Tehuelkünnü and Tuelche people), 3) Kün'k language (Tehuelche and Yacana-künnü people), 4) Het language (Chechehet and Divihet people) (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1922).

(Casamiquela, 1956; Escalada, 1949). Although he was wrong to propose a new linguistic group, his publications about the “Het linguistic group” were a significant contribution to the linguistic studies in those days, being based on the geographical and ethnical identification method that in principle was valid.

THE CYCLE OF THE MYTHS

Among the linguistic data he collected, Lehmann-Nitsche found a considerable number of indigenous stories associated with climatic and astronomical phenomena. According to him, the study of these elements would not only allow an understanding of indigenous cosmogony and worldview, but more importantly, a study of their “primitive soul” (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1916f: 28). As the French philosopher Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857-1939) pointed out in the early twentieth century, indigenous stories were conceived as a material means in which their “primitive” soul materialized, making it possible to register and accept them as ethnological evidence (Lévy-Bruhl, 1927).

For Lehmann-Nitsche, the development of an ethnographic map of South America would be possible only through the articulation of indigenous linguistic, mythological, and astronomical elements in a single explanatory model, which would identify geographical areas in which indigenous peoples live as well as zones of interaction (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1930b; 1937). This led him to emphasize that until that moment the study of human’s physical characteristics had not yet produced useful scientific results, whereas the study of the “psychic field” proposed by ethnology promised to revert this situation (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1922b: 22).

Following the ideas of Rudolf Martin and the German ethnologist Emil Schmidt (1837-1906), Lehmann-Nitsche defined anthropology as “the physical and psychological study of humankind through comparison” (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1906: 5). He divided this study into two interrelated and complementary fields: physical anthropology, which for him was anthropology per se, and psychic anthropology, which comprised both ethnology and related disciplines such as linguistic and mythology (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1906). He also remarked that at the beginning of the twentieth century the study of South American indigenous mythology had been conducted by persons without professional training, except for the studies by Ehrenreich of South American indigenous myths and legends that provided the first scientific approach to this subject (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1916g).

In 1905, Ehrenreich proposed an integrated model to explain the thematic similarities between American myths and to establish relations with those of Europe. Using a geological analogy, he suggested the existence of an old “layer” of myths and stories originating from the American continent, subsequently

registering an infiltration and dissemination of European isolated mythological elements. Ehrenreich stated that only the convergence of data provided by physical anthropology and ethnology would allow for the reconstruction and study of humankind's historical evolution; and furthermore, to determine patterns of migration and social interaction. Noting the absence of such studies in South America, he urged scholars working in this region to initiate these studies in order to ensure that their work would complement the research carried out in North America²⁵ (Ehrenreich, 1905).

Lehmann-Nitsche's studies of indigenous mythology and astronomy responded to Ehrenreich's request to determine "mythological cycles" for the region of Gran Chaco and Patagonia in order to develop an inter-American comparative mythology (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1937). For this purpose, he conducted an extensive review of the literature and began exchanging letters with scholars working on similar issues in Chile and Peru.²⁶ In this way, he was able to gather a large quantity of information on terrestrial phenomena (earthquakes, volcanoes), atmospheric phenomena (rain, thunder), and cosmic phenomena (solar and lunar eclipses).

This information was related to that collected during his fieldwork in northern Patagonia (1915 and 1916) and data provided by his informants in La Plata. According to him, this should have allowed him to verify the information and more importantly, to overcome possible misconceptions resulting from working only in museum cabinets. Lehmann-Nitsche pointed out that his research intended to surpass the "misconceptions born in the cabinet and in the spirit of those people who never worked with representatives of primitive humans" (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1922b: 25). At the same time, following recommendations of Konrad Theodor Preuss, he contrasted the historical information about cosmic phenomena with astronomical records in order to rectify errors resulting from the alleged subjectivity of written sources. In this sense, he asked astronomers for astronomical records of the position of stars at specific dates and instructions on how to calculate these²⁷ (Ballesterro, 2014).

From these sources, Lehmann-Nitsche addressed themes that, according to him, were preferred by scholars working on comparative mythology, namely eclipses and the universal flood. He speculated that this predilection responded to the influence exerted by the Christian religion on the intellectual world. Although Lehmann-Nitsche respected the religious choices of other scholars, he warned that these should not influence the choice of the studies topics. Regretting such influence, Lehmann-Nitsche remarked, "The predilection of the mythologist for these subjects can be explained, I believe, by the secondary and unconscious effect of the Biblical tradition that dominated and continues to dominate – much longer than is admitted – the scientific world on their conception of the world and the universe" (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1916h: 206).

25 He specifically referred to Franz Boas' research on the mythology of the indigenous peoples of the Northwest Pacific coast.

26 For Chile, he entered into correspondence with the English civil engineer and ethnologist Richard E. Latcham (1869-1943) and the Chilean physician Aureliano Oyarzún (1858-1947). For Peru, he contacted the Ecuadorian historian Jacinto Jijón y Caamaño (1890-1950) and the American ethnologist Stansbury Hagar (1869-1942).

27 He consulted the Argentinean astronomer Félix Aguilar (1884-1943), director of La Plata's Astronomical Observatory, and the American astronomer Charles Dillon Perrine (1867-1951), director of Córdoba's Astronomical Observatory.

Lehmann-Nitsche's selection of subjects was also due to technical reasons. Most stories he collected had these themes as central core, with the exception of only three (about the tiger as a mythical animal, the leadership granted through the magical characteristics of the axe, and a stone giant). At the time of his analysis, Lehmann-Nitsche had difficulty acquiring recent literature, already the norm within Museo de La Plata's research dynamics, but even worse after the First World War.

The Argentinean academic community, especially scientific societies, subjected German scholars residing in Argentina to intimidation and discrimination during and after the Great War of 1914-18. In addition, German scholars had problems acquiring anthropological instruments or recent literature from Europe, due to the precarious social and economic situation in which Europe found itself. In view of this situation, and following the example of Franz Boas in the United States, individual initiatives and assistance committees were organized in Argentina by German scholars in order to compensate the shortages in scholarly material (Ballestero, 2014).

In such a situation, the network constituted by German scholars working on the same issues proved to be a valuable resource, providing Lehmann-Nitsche with the necessary references derived from the literature. Together with the scholars mentioned in footnote 24, those who helped Lehmann-Nitsche were the German archaeologist and ethnologist Max Uhle (1856-1944); the Brazilian historians Basílio de Magalhães (1874-1957) and João Fernandes (1860-1934); the Chilean botanist Gualterio Schalleberg (1898-1982); the German linguist Carl Bezold (1859-1922); and the German ethnologists Walter Lehmann (1878-1939) and Alfred Maass (1863-1946).

Following Ehrenreich's theoretical and methodological proposals, Lehmann-Nitsche proceeded to systematically arrange and compare all versions of mythological explanations of climatic and astronomical phenomena. Based on this comparative summary, he identified characteristic details from which he established similarities and differences. The reduction of the large number of variables to a minimum allowed Lehmann-Nitsche to specify convergence, isolation, and exchange zones (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1916f, 1930b). Far from being a novelty, this methodological approach had earlier been implemented by the German geographer and ethnologist Richard Andree (1835-1912) and the Austrian ethnologist Moriz Winternitz (1863-1937) in order to isolate the essential components of universal myths and elaborate a common explanatory matrix (Ballestero, 2014).

For Lehmann-Nitsche the repetition of these elements provided important evidence in support of the "unity of the human mind," a hypothesis formulated by Adolf Bastian, director of the Royal Museum of Ethnology in Berlin. At the same time, the repetition of these elements was used to suggest that the evolution

of the human mind could be studied by using the empirical, inductive method of the natural sciences, transcribing the subjective and abstract concepts of the immediate experience into measurable, observable and comparable elements.

Convinced that humankind's physical unity had already been established, Bastian focused on establishing the psychic unity of thought because for him the history of humanity was the history of the human mind. The way to study it was not through subjectively written sources, but by examining and comparing material culture from the perspective of geography and history, which he believed would reveal that the same psychological elements circulate "through the heads of all peoples, in all times and places" (Bastian, 1860: 9).

The only reference to this kind of approach for South America was the research by the Austrian priest and ethnologist Wilhelm Schmidt (1868-1954) on the development from monotheism to polytheism²⁸. Using Bastian's concept of "elementary ideas", the cultural migration theory by the German geographer Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904) and the concept of "cultural circles" by the German ethnologist Leo Frobenius (1873-1938), Schmidt proposed a relational analysis of the cultural history of South American indigenous peoples, establishing three "cultural circles" for South America: a circle of nomadic hunter-gatherer peoples, a circle of sedentary peoples, and a circle of high-culture peoples (Schmidt, 1913).

Based on this theoretical-methodological matrix, Lehmann-Nitsche established a series of "scientific analogies between geographically distant peoples," identifying "mythological regions" and suggesting a number of intracultural and intercultural relations between the Old World and the New (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1922b: 50). The identification of common and recurrent elements allowed Lehmann-Nitsche to argue that there was not a common origin of the diluvial myth, but rather various and chronologically different origins. In contrasting these elements with zoological information (in cases in which animals appeared) and with historical information presented in colonial documents, Lehmann-Nitsche was able to geographically and temporally identify those places that could be considered points of dispersion of the myth's different versions. In the specific case of the diluvial myths from Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru, and Chile, he concluded that they were strongly related, the latter being the confluence and dispersion point of the myth's different versions (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1916f; 1916g; 1916h).

With regard to solar and lunar eclipses, he proposed to define zones according to the gender assigned to the sun and the moon. In this way, the anthropomorphization of the latter into man and woman respectively made it possible to accurately delimit a western region that, across the Andes Mountain range, extended from Ecuador to Tierra del Fuego. At the same time, the anthropomorphization of the sun and the moon into human beings delimited an eastern re-

28 Schmidt was a key and prominent actor in the further development of the cultural circle concept or "Kulturkreis", which was the central core of the so-called Vienna school of ethnology. Schmidt's main contribution was to incorporate the criteria of cultural stratum; continuity and relatedness, extending the cultural circle concept into a cultural complex that included material culture, economy and religion.

gion that stretches from Brazil to northern Patagonia (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1916g, 1922b, 1937). Finally, Lehmann-Nitsche defined “mythological cycles” for each “mythological region,” which, following the approach of the German psychologist Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920), allowed him to identify the “ethnic psychology” of each group and establish mutual cultural correspondences with Central Europe and Asia (Lehmann-Nitsche, 1937).

CONCLUSION

Over the course of two decades, Lehmann-Nitsche employed a range of human, financial, instrumental, and physical resources in order to establish multiple registers of anatomical, ethnological, linguistic, and mythological features of Patagonia’s inhabitants. On the one hand, this variety of topics corresponded to the changing characteristics of the German anthropological tradition. In this sense, Lehmann-Nitsche adapted to these changes in order to use the indigenous inhabitants of Patagonia as “cultural capital” for lubricating patronage networks and build his career. On the other, for him a complete understanding of indigenous peoples was only possible through an integral study that included both physical anthropology and ethnology.

As he explained in a private letter to his family, the publication of these results might not be relevant, but the important task was to contribute to international discussions with data collected from indigenous in Patagonia, something few European scholars could do. Moreover, continuously publishing academic papers was a way for Lehmann-Nitsche to accumulate sufficient academic prestige for him to be able to return to Germany and obtain an academic position there (Ballesterro, 2014).

Lehmann-Nitsche’s studies on Patagonia’s inhabitants took place in an international, political, and academic context, in which, also due to the values that shaped the policies of anthropological practices, the inhabitants of Patagonia were study subjects with a high “scientific value,” a value that increased for epistemological and practical reasons. On the one hand, they were considered to be one of the most “primitive” indigenous peoples of the world and therefore a key subject for studying human history. In turn, their alleged condition of “primitiveness” condemned them to an inexorable passage of time and thereby, an almost certain physical extinction. Therefore, the recording of these living remnants of the past became imperative.²⁹ On the other, travelling from Europe to Patagonia during the second half of the nineteenth century involved a considerable investment of time and money that not all scholars could or were willing to afford.

As other scholars studying “natural peoples” in Africa, Australia, and South America, Lehmann-Nitsche established and participated in extensive interna-

29 This widespread anthropological idea, known as the “salvage paradigm,” had, since the second half of the nineteenth century, been associated with the “notion of an ethnographic—indeed a scientific—mission, not to stem the tide of civilization’s advance but to preserve that which was about to be destroyed” (Gruber, 1970: 1294).

tional networks of collection, collaboration, and exchange in order to obtain osteological and ethnographic materials from the inhabitants of Patagonia. These materials were articulated into the broader comparative series that scholars argued would allow them to empirically analyze and understand the long and complex sequences of human history and the development of the human species itself.

In the pursuit of his academic and professional future, Lehmann-Nitsche collected and analyzed skulls, long bones, language samples, music, and mythological beliefs from Patagonian indigenous people. They contained the past that scholars found interesting and that was threatened by the passage of time. Lehmann-Nitsche codified them as indices, cranial measurements, wax cylinders, vocabularies or stories written into his field notebooks, in order to insert them into international anthropological networks. In so doing, he granted the indigenous peoples of Patagonia temporal transcendence and disseminated their culture in different fields of knowledge.

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