

THE CONSTRUCTION OF PALEONTOLOGY IN SOUTH AMERICA

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Ideas about the existence of giants filled the minds of the first foreign explorers of America. Huge fossil bones were frequently found in Mexico, Bolivia, Peru and Chile during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Lujan Megatherium found in 1787 was immortalized in Cuvier's papers, in which the researches of Larranaga, the Uruguayan naturalist, were mentioned. In Brazil, some of the first gigantic fossil bones were found during the 'gold rush' in Vila Rica, province of Minas Gerais in 1785. The first paper dealing with Pleistocene mammals was written by Burlamaque, the director of the Museu Nacional do Rio de Janeiro in 1855. In Chile, the first description of mastodont bones found in Talca in 1835 was registered in the catalog of the Museo Nacional de Santiago in 1878. This paper presents some episodes of the history of the construction of Paleontological sciences in South America. Linking the development of these sciences to museums, it points out the activities of 'national' or 'European' researchers who had worked here. It deals also specially with the construction of Paleontology in Brazil and Argentina at the end of the nineteenth century discussing the scientific cooperation between Herman von Ihering, the director of Museu Paulista, and the Argentine paleontologist Florentino Ameghino regarding their theories on Patagonian Paleontology.