

Chapter 2

The Invention of Canarian Prehistory and Early Archaeological Heritage Management in the Nineteenth Century (1868–1936)

At the end of the seventeenth century, following the gradual disappearance of the indigenous Canarians and their culture, their legacy began to be viewed from an archaeological rather than an ethnographic perspective, as previously noted. European authors between the fourteenth century and most of the seventeenth century were not interested in archaeological information regarding the indigenous Canarian world, inasmuch as the information they possessed referred to surviving native populations who were therefore ethnographic subjects rather than fossils. This explains why no studies were conducted in the Canary Islands similar to those produced by antiquarians in Europe (Trigger 2006, p. 22), in which research into (archaeological) material evidence supplemented studies based on written documents. Therefore, archaeological interest in the indigenous past began in the Canary Islands only in the second half of the eighteenth century and was based on searching for and collecting Guanche remains. It was common practice among the wealthy, who could afford the luxury of purchasing objects belonging to the indigenous culture, to possess a mummy, skeleton, or skull of an indigenous Canarian which they kept in their study to display to friends (Diego 1953, p. 136). These items were sold by looters to the Canarian and even foreign collectors, destroying the potential for future archaeological research.

2.1 The First Archaeological Collections

During this period there was no need for archaeological excavations in the Canary Islands, because Guanche funerals usually took place in natural caves where the corpse and provisions were deposited, whether mummified or not, without being buried.¹

The interest in Canarian antiquities did not become widespread until the early nineteenth century. The first collections were assembled in the first half of the century, namely the Juan de Megliorini y Spínola and Gabinete o Museo Casilda de Tacoronte collections, both in Tenerife, the Instituto de Canarias de La Laguna collection, also

¹ On the variety and types of indigenous Canarian burials, see the work of Arco (1977 and 1992–1993).

in Tenerife, which had a Natural History Museum with a large number of indigenous skulls and bone remains, several ceramic vessels, a millstone, and a mummy, and the Conde de la Vega Grande collection in Gran Canaria. Some years later, in 1874, the Tenerife scholar Anselmo J. Benítez founded the Villa Benítez Museum in Santa Cruz de Tenerife (Farrujia 2010, Chap. 3).

In their time, these archaeological collections were considered museums, given that they were designed to be visited. However, although they contained some interesting items and archaeological remains from indigenous Canarian settlements, they should not be considered actual museums but simply collections of antiquities and curios assembled by their owners, who usually had no academic training, as Ramírez (1997, p. 312) and Mederos (2003, p. 196) have noted. The creation of these collections explicitly reveals an archaeological interest in the material culture of the indigenous Canarians and, above all, in anthropological remains, whether mummified or not. They were not, therefore, balanced collections, inasmuch as they were created randomly, according to circumstances and the criteria set by their owners. Moreover, they were created essentially by the aristocracy and the middle class, unlike the situation in mainland Spain where the Catholic Church also played an important role in the study of antiquities.

In the Iberian peninsula, many convents and monasteries treasured archaeological items for centuries, and many important personalities of the Catholic Church, such as Fidel Fita and Colomé (1835–1918), among others, played a crucial role in the study of antiquities, studying the history of the Iberian peninsula in antiquity, and especially everything related to the indigenous population (Maier 2003; Ayarzagüena 2004). But in the Canary Islands, the role of the Catholic Church in archeology was marginal, practically nonexistent. The Canarian indigenous cultures were classified as Neolithic and studied mainly from the naturalistic paradigm. Consequently, the research in prehistoric archeology, whose central axis was the antiquity of man, was developed by members of the liberal bourgeoisie, who belonged to liberal institutions, such as El Museo Canario. The active participation of the Catholic Church was basically limited to the dialectical opposition to Darwin's evolutionism, in the second half of the nineteenth century, a panorama that is clearly in contrast with the active role played by the religious in the Canaries in previous centuries. The Dominican Fray Alonso de Espinosa (1594) and the Franciscan Fray José de Sosa (1678) paid attention in their respective books to the study and description of the Canarian indigenous societies (Farrujia 2010).

As previously noted, the development of archaeological collections centered mainly on Tenerife and Gran Canaria or, in other words, the “central” islands in the archipelago, where cultural, economic, and social development was more extensive. In the case of Lanzarote and Fuerteventura, for example, centuries of isolation and a poor, arid, and sparsely populated environment had contributed towards a lack of appreciation of cultural assets (Cabrera 1996, p. 15). In the case of islands such as La Gomera there is no information on these initial stages of Canarian archaeology. In El Hierro archaeology became more important after the rediscovery of the El Júlán rock engravings in 1873. In the case of La Palma the first archaeological news is also related to rock art, namely the Cueva de Belmaco engravings, discovered at the end of the eighteenth century (Farrujia 2009 and 2010, Chap. 8).

This fragmented and uneven scenario shows that, in terms of culture, the Canary Islands have had to confront an unusual geographical situation, namely their remoteness from the major centers of communication, particularly in the case of the more peripheral islands such as Lanzarote, Fuerteventura, and El Hierro. The culture that developed on the islands has, in historical terms, had to deal with the discontinuity of an (island) territory that has, until recently, suffered from poor communications. In other words, the intellectual and creative Canarian culture had to confront both an “interior” and an “exterior” context that had conflicting meanings.

2.2 The Beginning of Prehistoric Archaeology in the Canary Islands

In the Canary Islands it was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that archaeology, as the “science of objects” and fieldwork, began to develop. This was due to the development of prehistoric studies in western Europe and, in part, the relationship that had been established between the Cro-Magnon race and the indigenous Canarians (Farrujia 2004, p. 251). In these initial stages of Canarian archaeology, French influence is clear, both in the direct involvement of French authors in the islands and in the influence that many of them had on Canarian intellectuals, as well as the fact that some of the latter had trained in France.

Moreover, the archaeological studies developed at the time in France, Germany, or England cannot be understood without taking into account the economic, political, and social changes that emerged in Europe as a result of the Industrial Revolution and which affected its genesis and the development of the emerging disciplines of archaeology and anthropology, both closely linked to the bourgeois sectors of society. In the case of the Canary Islands, the impact of economic factors (a crisis or boom in particular crops, the establishment of free ports in 1852,² the trade revival, etc.) led to the configuration and consolidation of a capitalist economy, turning the (landowning and merchant) bourgeoisie into the ruling social class and, as in the rest of Europe, the sector of society most interested in archaeological and anthropological studies.

The leading geostrategic role played by the archipelago itself in the colonial division of Africa by the European powers is also a factor that should be taken into consideration in analyzing Canarian archaeological studies, because the complex web of annexionist and colonial interests ultimately made the islands an enclave coveted by the European powers. This would, in fact, lead to the development of a colonialist archaeology with racist undertones in the Canary Islands, in which certain foreign authors associated with Canarian studies collaborated (Farrujia 2005).

² The establishment of free ports allowed the Canary Islands a significant level of openness to the outside world and broad scope to adapt to international economic change. This measure involved the liberalization of the entry and exit of goods in the archipelago, stimulating the island economy and creating an important fiscal incentive for trade with, and by, the islands. Free ports favored banana and tomato exports to Europe from the end of the nineteenth century. In terms of archaeological studies, it fostered links between the Canary Islands and Europe and the subsequent arrival of scientific publications, mainly from France and England. Canarian intellectuals could therefore have access to the leading archaeological literature of the time.

2.3 The Cro-Magnon Race and the System of the Four Ages

In 1837 the stratigraphic excavation of the Abbeville archaeological site, led by the pioneer of French prehistory Boucher Crèvecoeur de Perthes, and the subsequent publication of the findings in 1860, inaugurated a phase in prehistoric science that was characterized by the discovery of “antediluvian man.” However, the main advances in Palaeolithic archaeology took place after 1860, when the number of prehistoric excavations increased and the findings were published in the *Revue archéologique* and in *Matériaux*, placing particular importance on the discoveries made in river terraces in the north of the country. The most relevant of these—particularly because of its repercussions for the Canary Islands—occurred in 1868, when Louis Lartet (1840–1899) discovered at the Cro-Magnon site (Les Eyzies, Dordogne) the remains of five members of this race. Armed with this material evidence, the studies then aimed to determine how long these humans had lived in the area and whether evolutionist traits could be detected as early as the Paleolithic period (Gran-Aymerich 2001, p. 196). However, it was not until 1867 that the engineer Gabriel de Mortillet developed a system similar to that of John Lubbock to define four ages: the Flaked Stone Age, the Polished Stone Age, the Bronze Age, and the Iron Age. As already argued, Mortillet’s classification was based on a typology for tools and artifacts, which were organized into periods.³ Thus Mortillet defined a program of study based on a notion of the global, linear, and universal progress of the human species, in which biological and cultural evolution were parallel (Coye 2004, p. 5). The system of the four ages was therefore defined by a system of organization based on artifacts and the ability to construct relative chronologies from archaeological data using seriation and stratigraphy.

2.3.1 1868: The Cro-Magnon Race and Prehistoric Archaeology in the Canary Islands

As previously noted, in 1868 Luis Lartet discovered fossilized Cro-Magnon remains. A few years later in 1871, Paul Broca advised that there were morphological similarities between some of the Canarian skulls in the Bouglival collection in the École des Hautes Études, which had come from the Barranco Hondo site (Tenerife), and those of Cro-Magnon man. Another French anthropologist, Théodore Hamy (1842–1908), agreed with Broca, which led Quatrefages to write to Sabin Berthelot (1794–1880), the French consul in the Canary Islands at the time, asking for more material to be sent for him to study with the aim of confirming this possible link (Farrujia 2010, Chap. 3). However, in 1874, without having received the material they had requested, the French authors, Quatrefages and Hamy published a summary of their work *Crania ethnica, les crânes des races humaines* in the *Bulletin of the Anthropological Society of Paris*, based on a study of the distribution of the Cro-Magnon fossil remains identified thus far. The authors pointed out the differences that existed between the Neanderthals and the Cro-Magnon race and confirmed the

³ The notion of “period” is directly related to “industry,” prefiguring the concept of culture.

presence of the Cro-Magnon type—whose main settlement had been established in the Vézère region—in France, Holland, Italy, and Tenerife (Quatrefages and Hamy 1874).⁴ Despite having identified the presence of this Quaternary race in the Canary Islands, it was not until 1877 that Berthelot sent 10 skulls that had come from El Hierro and Gran Canaria to Paris, which explains why the expected characteristics of the Cro-Magnon race could not be clearly defined until then. This led to Quatrefages, on March 22nd, 1876, commissioning René Verneau (1852–1938) to undertake an exhaustive investigation, resulting in his scientific mission to the Canary Islands. René Pierre Verneau was a professor at the National Museum of Natural History and the Institute of Human Paleontology, curator of the Museum of Ethnography, president of the French Institute of Archaeology and editor-in-chief of the journal *Anthropologie*.

Verneau's contribution was to systematize all the anthropological data, using recently discovered methods and working from a broad archaeological–ethnological base. This enabled him to discover an important part of what later researchers would echo: large numbers of Cro-Magnon individuals, especially in La Gomera and Tenerife and striking differences in the Gran Canaria population. However, he had little material, in particular skulls, to work with and his publications were based on only a part of the material he collected. Moreover, he never fully revised the El Museo Canario collection in Las Palmas (discussed later) a collection that Verneau himself had assembled and organized.

Verneau also defined the indigenous culture in terms of mega-elements (dolmens or sepulchers in caves), which contributed towards creating an excessively simplistic vision of the cultures being studied. In addition, the influence of anthropological arguments on his work overshadowed the role that sociocultural factors may have played as defining elements in the societies being studied. The excavations he personally undertook, which essentially focused on recovering bone remains, usually skulls, also contributed towards undervaluing evidence based on artifacts as well as the archaeological context itself, thus diminishing a good deal of the archaeological potential of the Canary Islands (Farrugia 2004). It is also important to note that a wealth of archaeological and anthropological material (essentially bone remains, the remains of mummies, ceramics, lithic tools, and paintings), was sent by Verneau to the Musée de l'Homme in Paris (Farrugia 2005). The looting of the Canarian archaeological heritage since the end of the seventeenth century is also reflected in travel literature. The most coveted items were mummies (Farrugia 2004, Chap. 11).

Verneau's view of the dispersal of the Cro-Magnon race contributed towards defending French imperialist interests in Africa and the Canary Islands, proceeding in the same way as his compatriots Faidherbe, Tissot, and Broca, among others. Reflecting the ethnocentric world view of the time, the expansion of the Cro-Magnon race beyond French territory implied that all the areas occupied by the said Quaternary race would have been populated in ancient times by the ancestors of the Gallic nation (Farrugia 2005). It should be noted that, according the observations of Quatrefages himself in an 1873 article entitled "*La Science et la Patrie*" (published in the

⁴ Within a few years the work of Quatrefages and Hamy had established Cro-Magnon man as the archetypal representative of the human race in the age of the reindeer (Upper Paleolithic era).

Bulletin of the *Association française pour l'avancement des sciences*), the scientist is a soldier, a well-educated population is a well-armed population, and scientific work should bring the joys of patriotism to a country. It was this patriotism, in fact, that would lead to the recognition, in 1889 of the Paris School of Anthropology as a public institution and to Gabriel de Mortillet writing the *Formation de la nation française* (1897; Blanckaert 2001, p. 19).

French scientific intervention in the Canary Islands (led by authors such as Sabin Berthelot and René Verneau) and the actual scientific contacts established between Canarian and French authors meant that Gallic archaeology became the model that was followed in the islands, both from a theoretical and a methodological point of view. It should be remembered that Sabin Berthelot lived in Tenerife for over 25 years and published some of his articles in local journals such as the *Revista de Canarias*, while also keeping in written contact with the Canarian intellectuals of the time. At the same time, René Verneau spent several periods in the El Museo Canario in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, where he studied its collection of anthropological and archaeological material and published the results of some of his work in the *Revista El Museo Canario*. In addition, French scientific publications (both archaeological and anthropological) circulated widely throughout the islands, as can be seen from the bibliographies used by Canarian authors (Farrujia 2010, Chap. 3).

With regard to these scientific contacts, it should also be remembered that Canarian authors such as Juan Bethencourt Alfonso (1847–1913) and Rosendo García Ramos y Bretillard (1834–1913), had been to Paris, where they had visited academies and offices and established contacts, which were continued in the form of letters when they returned to the islands, with leading scientists of the time, such as Armand de Quatrefages, Teodore Hamy, and Paul Broca (Farrujia 2004). The Canarian author Dr. Gregorio Chil y Naranjo (1831–1901) first became associated with French academic circles when he studied medicine at the Sorbonne University (Paris) from 1849 to 1859. Subsequently, he met Broca, Quatrefages, Hamy, Topinard, Verneau, and a couple of years later Gabriel de Mortillet, which helped to keep him up to date with the latest scientific developments. Chil was also familiar with the work of biologists such as Darwin (1859), physical anthropologists such as Broca, and prehistorians such as Boucher de Perthes (1847–1857), Mortillet (1872, 1882), and Lubbock (1865); in other words, he had read all the French and English authors who had helped disseminate evolutionist arguments throughout Europe. Through these friendships he was also able to attend various congresses and scientific exhibitions held in France, such as the conferences organized in Lille (1874) and Nantes (1875) by the *Association française pour l'Avancement des Sciences*.

2.3.2 *The Influence of the French Model in the Canary Islands*

This background meant that from a very early stage the principles of French prehistoric archaeology were assimilated in the Canary Islands, and that artifacts became the key to explaining the cultural evolution of the islands, on the basis of a combination of evolutionary and diffusionist theories. This explains why the Canarian authors

Fig. 2.1 Ceramic idols on display in El Museo Canario at the end of the nineteenth century, associated with the “prehistoric” phase. Photograph: Institut de Paléontologie Humaine (Paris)



would argue, on the basis of evolutionism and diffusionism, for the existence of the Stone Age in the Canary Islands. The physical location of the Canary Islands (as an archipelago in the Atlantic) meant that the first settlers would have arrived there by sea from a foreign base or center of diffusion, hence the coexistence of evolutionist and diffusionist theories in the Canarian archipelago in the nineteenth century.

Chil y Naranjo and Agustín Millares Torres (1826–1896), for example, claimed that there had been a crudely carved flint age in the Canary Islands (Chil y Naranjo 1876, p. 5; Millares 1893, p. 185), thus equating one of the prehistoric periods of the islands with one of the stages in French prehistory defined by Mortillet (the Flaked Stone Age). In addition, Chil y Naranjo (1876), Millares Torres (1893), and Bethencourt Alfonso (1912) argued for the existence of a Neolithic period in the Canary Islands on the basis of the existence of polished tools (associated with the Neolithic) and rough pottery in the archaeological records for the islands and the fact that the indigenous Canarians were cave dwellers. The presence of bone tools in Canarian sites also led Carlos Pizarroso y Belmonte (1841–1916) to associate the Guanches of Tenerife with the third Stone Age, known as the *Aurignac* by Mortillet and defined by a substantial increase in objects manufactured from bone (Pizarroso 1880, p. 68; Fig. 2.1).

The definition of the different ages in French prehistory was based on stratigraphy and seriation, but the situation was very different in the Canary Islands, where only artifacts were used. The lack of stratigraphic evidence from Canarian sites in comparison to French sites and, above all, the actual inability of Canarian intellectuals to recognize the existence of archaeological stratigraphy *in situ*, are the main factors that explain the pre-eminence of material evidence and the total absence of references to the existence of archaeological stratigraphy. Consequently, nineteenth-century Canarian archaeology contained an important internal contradiction: although they had no relative chronology based on stratigraphy, artifacts were used to define the cultural sequence for Canarian prehistory. Typology was therefore the methodological tool used to establish diachrony in Canarian prehistory, inasmuch as it was the differences observed in the form and technology of the artifacts that enabled them to be classified in sequential order, before or after each other.

Fig. 2.2 Indigenous and historic (ethnographic) ceramics from Gran Canaria on display in El Museo Canario at the end of the nineteenth century. The indigenous ceramics, made by hand without the use of a wheel, were considered “prehistoric” by nineteenth-century researchers. Photograph: Teodoro Maisch



In excavating archaeological sites, the different Canarian authors proceeded more in the manner of antiquarians than archaeologists, because they focused only on recovering material evidence, therefore marginalizing or undervaluing any information that could be obtained from the archaeological context itself. This interest in archaeological objects purely for their aesthetic qualities did not require any rigorous methodology for documenting the concrete circumstances of the find. In those days sites were literally “emptied” in the search for objects, many of which were ignored, together with the related sedimentological and structural details (stratigraphy). This was also common practice among Spanish mainland archaeologists (Lull and Micó 1997, p. 114) and other contemporary European archaeologists (Schnapp 2002, p. 135; Fig. 2.2).

At the same time, the firm belief in unilinear evolutionism (combined, in the case of the Canary Islands, with diffusionism) led the same Canarian authors to refer to the existence of megaliths (dolmens) in the Canary Islands that were related to those in France (such as the l’Ardeche dolmen). From this, it was concluded that the indigenous Canarians had existed since the Quaternary period and therefore since the paleontological era of the great mammals.

However, contrary to the opinions of Chil, Pizarroso, and Bethencourt, there are no archaeological records of any dolmens in the Canary Islands. With regard to this fact, it should be borne in mind that megalithic monuments (dolmens and tombs)—one of the first prehistoric phenomena to attract the attention of enthusiasts—were frequently confused in the nineteenth century with merely unstable stones and natural cavities, while at the same time the wildest theories emerged to explain their existence. From this it may be deduced that in the era in which Chil and Bethencourt were writing there was no empirical capacity to distinguish between anthropic megalithic structures and simple nonanthropic geological formations (Farrujia 2002, p. 43), which may account for the erroneous assessments made by both authors. The influence of unilinear evolutionism on these scholars should also be noted, leading them to establish forced archaeological comparisons between the Canarian and French contexts (Fig. 2.3).

Fig. 2.3 Indigenous Cro-Magnon skulls on display in El Museo Canario at the end of the nineteenth century. Photograph: Teodoro Maisch



Together with evidence based on artifacts and megaliths, the presence of the Cro-Magnon race in the archipelago was another of the arguments employed by the Canarian authors of the time to attribute a Neolithic culture to the indigenous people or Guanches. It should also be borne in mind that during the nineteenth century scientific contacts with France meant that Canarian anthropology, following the methodology and theoretical principles of French physical anthropology, adopted raciology wholesale as the main approach to studying the indigenous population. Yet, whereas in France the scarcity of archaeological data meant that archaeologists resorted to the conclusions drawn by physical anthropologists, linguists, and ethnologists on the assumption that ethnology revealed almost everything they wanted to know about prehistoric times, in the Canary Islands the situation was very different, because physical anthropology and the actual ethnohistorical sources were used to supplement archaeological information.

The lack of bronze and iron tools in the archaeological records perused by the nineteenth-century Canarian authors led them to reject the idea of a Bronze Age and an Iron Age in the Canary Islands. The fact that the indigenous Canarians were defined as a “rudimentary civilization” is symptomatic of this approach (Chil y Naranjo 1876, p. 10).

In short, the contacts between French and Canarian intellectuals and the relationship established early on between the indigenous Canarians and the Cro-Magnon race and consequently between the Canary Islands and French prehistory, were factors that ensured the success of the French frame of reference. Nor should it be forgotten that the archaeology and anthropology of the time were respected because they had been developed in France (and also in England), the international center of political, economic, and cultural development at the time (Trigger 2006, p. 107). Due to its prestige, the archaeology of the Paleolithic period provided a model for the study of prehistory in Western Europe and therefore in the Canary Islands (Fig. 2.4).

In applying external criteria to the Canary Islands, indigenous Canarian cultures were treated as if they shared the same evolutionary development as other parts of Africa or Europe. In this sense, the cultural evolutionist models simplified the indigenous Canarian societies, as they did other past societies (Johnson 2000, p. 178). Thus the particularities or specific features of individual cultures were not considered important. Moreover, the evolutionist cultural models took neither contingency nor

Fig. 2.4 Caves in Gáldar (ca. 1895–1900). Photograph: Luis Ojeda Pérez (El Museo Canario). Cave-dwelling was one of the arguments used at the time for classifying indigenous Canarian societies as prehistoric



historical accident into account, giving the impression that all societies evolved inexorably into states. Finally, it should be remembered that the European evolutionist archaeology and anthropology developed in Africa after colonial partitioning or, in other words, after the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, was a clear example of European imperialistic interventionism. In this sense, the French archaeology developed in the Canary Islands at the end of the nineteenth century was clearly influenced by colonial interests and motivations, because evolutionist theories provided, among other things, a justification for European superiority and its consequent colonial domination of Africa and the Canary Islands (Farrujia 2005).

The main consequence of this was the inevitable adoption of French scientific premises by Canarian authors and thus the development of an ethnocentric view of the indigenous Canarians.

It is striking that the prehistoric archaeology developed in mainland Spain had no impact on the Canary Islands. This may be explained by the fact that prehistoric archaeology had started some years earlier in the Iberian peninsula at the beginning of the 1860s, the lack of any significant contact between academic circles on the mainland and in the Canary Islands in terms of the emergence of prehistoric studies in the islands, the lack of interest in Canarian issues on the part of mainland authors, and the actual synchrony in the development of prehistoric archaeology in the Iberian peninsula and in the Canary Islands, because in both cases the first publications were inspired by the French model, which quickly became the frame of reference.

2.4 Archaeological Heritage Management in the Nineteenth Century

As previously noted, it was the bourgeois intellectuals on the islands who adopted the main theoretical principles that lay behind the scientific advances of the time and were considered necessary, not only in order to understand society but, more

important, to create new policies to improve social development. Regenerationism, positivism, and evolutionism were the focal points of reflection and gave rise to bitter controversy, which was at times more political than scientific.

It was from this environment that the institutions dedicated to the preservation of the cultural and biological heritage of the indigenous Canarians first emerged: El Gabinete Científico, El Museo Canario, and the Sociedad La Cosmológica. They all drew on anthropological and archaeological research on the Guanches, in the form of a certain amount of fieldwork on the various islands, as previously discussed. One fundamental characteristic of these institutions was that, although their objectives included an essentially heritage conservation concept in terms of the Guanche archaeological and ethnographic collections, they were all designed to serve more as research centers, in particular El Museo Canario. This required archives and libraries and the opportunity to carry out individual research, as reflected in the expeditions and excavations undertaken by their members.

2.4.1 *El Gabinete Científico (Santa Cruz de Tenerife)*

In September 1877, the *Gabinete Científico* was founded in Santa Cruz de Tenerife, an institution that was to play a leading role in the development of anthropology and archaeology in the western Canary Islands (Tenerife, La Palma, La Gomera, and El Hierro) under the leadership of Juan Bethencourt Alfonso. The institution was established as an annex to the *Establecimiento de Segunda Enseñanza* due to the need for a museum that would provide practical training for students at the Institute. From the outset it was involved in developing a series of archaeological and anthropological activities organized by Bethencourt himself. He supervised the work of a wide range of collaborators who, acting almost as partners, provided the institution with the archaeological materials it needed. There is evidence of the contribution made by Ramón Gómez, for example, a collaborator in Puerto de La Cruz, who sent 120 Guanche skulls to the *Gabinete*. *El Gabinete* was also supported by collaborators in La Gomera and Fuerteventura and when materials had to be collected from islands where there was no staff, Bethencourt Alfonso himself went there. There are records of his field trips to La Palma and El Hierro, as well as Gran Canaria and Lanzarote (Diego 1982, p. 9; Ramírez 1997, p. 314).

As stipulated in its 1878 Regulations, the *Gabinete* objectives included “the study of natural science and, in particular, natural science in the Canarian Archipelago” (p. 2) and therefore the study of the prehistoric anthropology and archaeology of the Canary Islands. As a result of its work under the leadership of Bethencourt Alfonso, over 500 skulls, several mummies, and specific items associated with the indigenous material culture (44 millstones, vessels, fish hooks, and 18 spears and shepherd’s crooks) were collected in Tenerife. The *Gabinete* also housed collections donated by, among others, Sr. Lebrun and Juan de la Puerta Canseco.

Among members of the *Gabinete*, special mention should be made of Juan Bethencourt Alfonso, Rosendo García Ramos, and Carlos Pizarroso y Belmonte, due to the

Fig. 2.5 Gregorio Chil y Naranjo in the Anthropology Room at El Museo Canario at the end of the nineteenth century. Photograph: El Museo Canario



contributions they made to the study of the indigenous Canarian world. They all published in the *Revista de Canarias* and other periodicals and formed the so-called "Scientific Generation of 1880."

After the death of Bethencourt Alfonso, followed by Rosendo García Ramos, the apathy and lack of skills of the other members and staff led to the decline of the *Gabinete*, whose collections were subsequently added to the Bernabé Rodríguez collection and the Anthropology and Natural History Museum in Santa Cruz de Tenerife, which was founded on December 31st, 1902.

2.4.2 El Museo Canario (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria)

In Gran Canaria there was a similar development, in terms of museology, although given the limited future prospects for Tenerife organizations, the outlook was more promising. In September 1879 a group of intellectuals headed by Dr. Gregorio Chil y Naranjo met with the aim of founding a scientific society that was later christened *El Museo Canario*. It was inaugurated in 1880 and had its headquarters on the second floor of the Las Palmas de Gran Canaria City Hall. The work of the institution has continued, despite some setbacks, up to the present day (Fig. 2.5).

The main aim of the society was to create a museum and library that would serve to develop and advance popular instruction, as well as the special study of subjects related to the Canary Islands and its products. It consisted of a museum, a study, a library, archives, and a regular periodical, the *El Museo Canario* scientific journal. It also organized cultural evenings and scientific–literary meetings involving speeches, discussions, and lectures and public conferences. As such, *El Museo Canario*, founded in a city that had no secondary education facilities or university, became the driving force behind higher education and scientific advancement in its particular field.

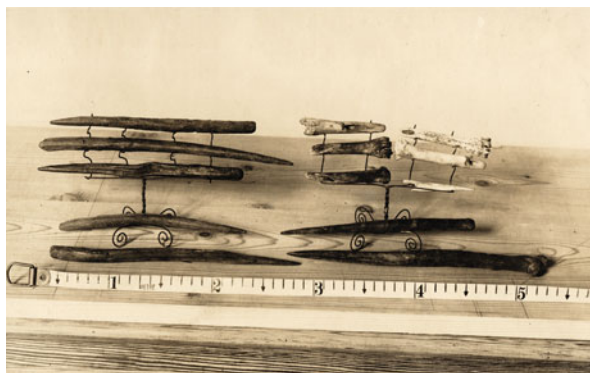
The first materials were gathered by Chil himself and by Víctor Grau-Bassas (1847–1918), who organized trips to the interior and southern areas of the island to recover mummies, fabrics, and indigenous ceramics, although without following any scientific method. Together with the work developed by Bethencourt Alfonso, essentially in Tenerife, this marked the beginnings of the first fieldwork in the Canary Islands that was in any sense systematic, from the 1870s onwards. The bulk of the *El Museo Canario* collection consisted of items discovered on field expeditions carried out by its members. However, there were also some important donations, such as the collection belonging to Don Fernando del Castillo Westerling, the Count of Vega Grande who, before he died, commissioned his children to entrust to the museum certain objects he had collected, mainly in the Arguineguin, Mogán, and Guayadeque areas, which were associated with the early inhabitants of Gran Canaria. In 1901 the Museum received a complete mummy, painted ceramic vessels, rush fabrics, and several idols (Millares 1901).

In *El Museo Canario* it was Gregorio Chil y Naranjo and, to a lesser extent, Agustín Millares Torres, who played a significant role in the study of the indigenous Canarians. From the point of view of schools of thought, evolutionism clearly predominated in the ideas of these two authors and within the institution founded by Chil. Their uncompromising defense of unilinear evolutionism would lead both to argue for the existence of the Paleolithic and Neolithic ages in the Canary Islands, as previously discussed. The importance of Chil y Naranjo, however, did not only lie in his individual work but also in his efforts to mobilize local intellectuals and scientists and in his contacts with European circles. In this sense, his most important project was the founding of *El Museo Canario*. Chil's objective was to introduce a solid line of research and suitable resources for the preservation of the historical–archaeological–ethnographic heritage that would enable *El Museo Canario* to become the main cultural center on the islands (Reglamento 1879; Farrujia 2005; Ortiz 2005, p. 214; Fig. 2.6).

2.4.3 *Sociedad La Cosmológica (Santa Cruz de La Palma)*

The island of La Palma also had its own scientific institution, the *Sociedad La Cosmológica*, founded in 1881. As can be seen from the first volume of its statutes, it was clearly influenced by the *El Museo Canario* model,

Fig. 2.6 Indigenous artifacts on display in El Museo Canario at the end of the nineteenth century. Photograph: Teodoro Maisch



The main objective of this association is to found a Museum of Natural History and Ethnography for the study of these subjects in general and the geological, faunal and floral products associated with the Guanches in particular. (Reglamento. . . , 1881)

Article 2 added that “no discussion of political or religious matters is permitted, unless in a purely speculative sense.” This clearly indicates that the leading intellectuals in the society were far more conservative in political and religious terms, inasmuch as many other contemporary island and mainland centers dedicated to scientific debate affirmed their inalienable right to freedom of thought in understanding natural phenomena.

The Regulations also established that the society should be “founded on the basis of items donated to the Museum by members or individuals and those which may be purchased with funds from the Society.” The archaeology section dedicated to the Guanches was in fact stocked with donations from private individuals and museums, in addition to items discovered during fieldwork carried out by the members. It consisted of ceramics, lithic tools, skulls, and other bones and was regularly supplemented by the results of the members’ research work in archaeological sites on the island.⁵

The *Cosmológica* Regulations bear the signature of its first president, Abelardo González Martínez, and its first headquarters were provided by the *Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País*, although they were not suitable for the work of the society. It subsequently moved to a house in Calle Cuna where the museum was opened to the public on January 23rd, 1887. In 1889 the Society moved again to the premises where it has remained to the present day, in the *Pósito Municipal* or *Casa Panera* building (Ortiz 2005, p. 221).

The contribution made by *La Cosmológica* to the study of the indigenous culture was modest, amounting to no more than the simple acquisition of archaeological

⁵ In 1983, 100 years after it was founded, *La Cosmológica*, which remained a private society, donated its museum to the Island Council and its collections form the basis of the Archaeology and Natural History section of the *Museo Insular del Cabildo de La Palma*.

Fig. 2.7 Antiquities Room at the Sociedad La Cosmológica at the end of the nineteenth century. Photograph: Sociedad La Cosmológica archives



and anthropological items and involving no underlying methodology other than opportunity. Moreover, it was more provincial in scope than El Museo Canario or the Gabinete Científico. Its members had less understanding of ideas and less distinguished scientific and academic backgrounds, and served more as promoters and disseminators of local culture than authentic creators of ideas and specific discourses on the cultural and human history of the archipelago and their own island. One leading figure within the institution, due to his work and legacy, was Antonio Rodríguez López (1836–1901), the author of works such as *Consideraciones sobre el Darwinismo* (1881) and *Los Bereberes del Riff* (1881), which reveal his creationist position and rejection of Darwinism, condemning its “atheist materialism” and arguing that religion was the basis of all institutions (Farrujia 2010, Chap. 3; Fig. 2.7).

2.5 Protection of the Archaeological Patrimony in the Legal Vacuum of the Nineteenth Century

The archaeological situation in the Canary Islands in the nineteenth century, in common with the situation on the Spanish mainland, suffered from a lack of legislation to cover excavation and antiquities. However, efforts were made to improve the archaeological methodology for fieldwork and conservation of the archaeological patrimony. The 1878 Regulations of *El Gabinete Científico* in Santa Cruz de Tenerife placed particular emphasis on the correct documentation of archaeological assets, stating that it was necessary to provide a detailed report of finds and “include references for mummies, skeletons, skulls, bones etc. belonging to the ancient races of these islands, describing, if possible and in as much detail as possible, the location and condition in which they were found” (Reglamento. . . , 1878, p. 6). The Regulations did not cover any matters relating to the handling and preservation of items, as was also the case in other European museums (Schnapp 2002).

The *El Museo Canario* Regulations, approved on March 26th, 1886, expressed a greater concern for the preservation of archaeological assets, referring specifically to the role of the curator, a position held in the early years by Víctor Grau Bassas, an excellent anatomist who, together with Diego Ripoché, was responsible for organizing the exhibits in the museum rooms. Article Six of the Statutes stipulates that it was necessary to keep a book of records containing detailed descriptions of the finds so that each item that arrived at the museum would be fully documented with descriptions, sketches, and drawings and the scientific value of the items would be enhanced. In addition it emphasized that there should be “the most accurate description of the objects found, the place where they were found and their origins, with orographic and physical data if necessary.” Articles Seven and Eight covered the work of the museum curator, stating that he should strive to take good care of the items and provide information “on their merits and importance” (Chil y Naranjo 1886).

These measures made it possible gradually to build up archaeological knowledge of the Canary Islands by documenting new and previously unknown finds and acquiring archaeological items that were housed and preserved in the *El Gabinete Científico* and *El Museo Canario* collections. However, given the lack of any adequate methodology and the attitude of the antiquarians involved in the work, the archaeological context of the items that were acquired was marginalized. In addition, both sets of regulations had little practical application and did not extend beyond the circle of scholars and intellectuals connected with the institutions.

2.6 The 1911 Law on Excavations and Antiquities

The aforementioned legal vacuum in the nineteenth-century would not be remedied until 1911 with the *Law of 7th June on Excavations and Antiquities* and the regulations for its application, which were approved on March 1st, 1912. This law prescribed regulations for artistic and scientific excavations and for the conservation of ruins and antiquities and may be seen as the first major Spanish law to regulate the historical–artistic heritage. It provided a legal concept for excavation and antiquities, stipulated that an inventory of monumental ruins should be created, restricted excavations of private property to the state as well as any incidentally discovered antiquities, empowered the state to authorize excavations, granted ownership of objects discovered to the authors of authorized excavations unless they were nonnationals (for whom access was made difficult, if not actually prohibited), legalized the exchange of antiquities predating the existence of the law and permitted copies of finds to be made for provincial and local museums. Considered as a whole, it was an acceptable law for its time that enabled excavation work to be organized but did not put an end to the problems associated with the ownership of finds. In addition to these technical weaknesses it was also criticized by conservatives during the course of a parliamentary debate, who objected to the control over the circulation of assets and the appropriation by the state of all finds. The law, as previously noted, was supplemented by the provisional regulations governing its implementation, which

added a precise time limit for the classification of antiquities (up to the reign of Carlos I) and gave more precise instructions for dealing with issues of exploitation, with the inspector general for fine arts responsible for both areas. The legislation also contained detailed provisions for the creation of a *Junta Superior de Excavaciones y Antigüedades* and special delegates for excavations. Following this, the junta was responsible for issuing permits for excavations and for receiving the records of work. It was also responsible for creating the heritage inventory, produced by its own staff, thus assuming many of the duties previously assigned to the *Comisiones Provinciales de Monumentos*, or Provincial Monuments Commissions (Yáñez 1997; Remesal et al. 2000, p. 26).⁶ It therefore became imperative to reform the 1865 Regulations governing the Monuments Commissions. In fact, the new Regulations were approved by the Royal Decree of 11th August 1918 and remained in place until the Provincial Monuments Commissions were finally abolished in 1985 (Almagro 2003, p. 189).

After the new law came into effect in Spain, a relative professionalization in the field of history ensued, both in terms of the individuals associated with official institutions (the *Academia*, *Escuela Diplomática*, and the universities) and those who had led the drive for improvements from outside, such as the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza*. Even so, between 1912 and 1933 the number of professional archaeologists carrying out excavation work only rose from 39 to 100 (Díaz-Andreu 1997, p. 408).

Emerging within an historical framework that was defined, among other aspects, by the celebration of values such as patriotism, the 1911 law considered that all antiquities discovered by chance underground or during the demolition of old buildings, were the property of the state. It also stipulated that only Spanish researchers authorized by the state could claim ownership of any items found during the course of their excavation work (Article 15) and that foreigners authorized by the state could only own one example of any items they discovered (Article 19) (Yáñez 1997; Farrujia 2004, p. 528).

Once it came into effect, the 1911 Law was quickly implemented in the Canary Islands, specifically in Tenerife, as a result of the Hooton affair (see Farrujia 2010, Chap. 5),⁷ but failed to put an end to the plundering of the archaeological heritage of the Canary Islands, which continued to suffer significant losses during the time of the Provincial Archaeological Excavation Commissions (1941–1968) and which is discussed in the next chapter.

⁶ Following the establishment of the II Republic, the Law on Artistic Heritage was passed on May 13th, 1933, replacing the Monuments Commissions with Arts Heritage Boards. After the Civil War, the Commissions were reinstated and reorganized under Decree 3194/1970 as “Historical-Artistic Heritage Commissions.” With the establishment of the autonomous communities and the cultural transfers, the “Historical Heritage Commissions” were formed, governed by the Law on Historical Heritage of 16/1985 (Remesal et al. 2000, p. 27).

⁷ The North American anthropologist Earnest Albert Hooton (1887–1954) was involved in archaeological excavations in Tenerife in 1915 without authorization under the terms of the 1911 Law. This led to the intervention of the Civil Guard who, nevertheless, failed to seize the indigenous anthropological remains, which found their way to the Peabody Museum at Harvard University in the United States.

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