

The origin of "El hombre en el Plata": on the birthdate and birthplace of Florentino Ameghino (1853–1911)

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THE ORIGIN OF "EL HOMBRE EN EL PLATA": ON THE BIRTHDATE AND BIRTHPLACE OF FLORENTINO AMEGHINO (1853–1911)

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Abstract. Florentino Ameghino was among the most prolific and influential paleontologists of South America. He left a vast body of scientific work, of considerable relevance even today, but also many open questions related to his enigmatic life and personality. One of these obscure aspects has surely been the absence of reliable geographical and chronological information on his birth. For more than a century, the main hypothesis was that Ameghino was born in the city of Luján (Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina) on the 18th of September, 1854. However, recent evidence reveals that Ameghino was undoubtedly born in Moneglia (Liguria, northwestern Italy) on the 19th of September, 1853. The reasons for this prolonged debate may lie in the intentional concealment of this information by Ameghino himself, but also in the ideological exploitation that shaped his persona after his death. This new evidence, far from being merely of passing interest, is here presented and analyzed, allowing new light to be shed on the life, personality, and sociohistorical context of Florentino Ameghino.

Key words. Ameghino. Argentina. Burmeister. Capellini. Italy. Luján. Moneglia. Moreno.

Resumen. EL ORIGEN DE "EL HOMBRE EN EL PLATA": SOBRE LA FECHA Y EL LUGAR DE NACIMIENTO DE FLORENTINO AMEGHINO (1853–1911). Florentino Ameghino fue uno de los paleontólogos más prolíficos e influyentes de América del Sur. Dejó una vasta producción científica, de considerable relevancia aún hoy, pero también muchas cuestiones abiertas relacionadas con su enigmática vida y personalidad. Uno de estos aspectos oscuros ha sido seguramente la ausencia de información geográfica y cronológica confiable sobre su nacimiento. Durante más de un siglo la hipótesis principal fue que Ameghino nació en la ciudad de Luján (provincia de Buenos Aires, Argentina) el 18 de septiembre de 1854. Sin embargo, evidencias recientes revelan que Ameghino sin duda nació en Moneglia (Liguria, noroeste Italia) el 19 de septiembre de 1853. Las razones de este prolongado debate pueden estar en el ocultamiento intencionado de esta información por parte del propio Ameghino, pero también en la explotación ideológica que se llevó a cabo sobre su figura tras su muerte. Esta nueva evidencia, lejos de tener un mero valor enciclopédico, se presenta y analiza aquí, permitiendo arrojar nueva luz sobre la vida, la personalidad y el contexto sociohistórico de Florentino Ameghino.

Palabras clave. Ameghino. Argentina. Burmeister. Capellini. Italia. Luján. Moneglia. Moreno.

FLORENTINO (Giovanni Battista Fiorino Giuseppe) Ameghino (1853–1911) was a pioneer of vertebrate paleontology in Argentina, as well as the rest of South America. The son of Italian (Ligurian) immigrants, he developed a passion for paleontology during his childhood years and later devoted his life to the study of human evolution and the extinct mammals of South America. Largely self-taught as a researcher, his travels to Europe between 1878 and 1881 (Fig. 1) contributed to his meteoric rise as an international authority in

the fields of prehistory and paleomammalogy (Casinos, 2012; Podgorny, 2017). On his return to Argentina, Ameghino proceeded to assume a series of important institutional positions in the cities of Córdoba, La Plata, and Buenos Aires. The recognition he earned in life endured beyond his premature death in 1911, which occurred during his tenure as director of the Museo Nacional de Buenos Aires. Soon thereafter, Ameghino's status was raised to that of a heroic intellectual, a self-taught scientist who achieved interna-

tional visibility despite his humble origins (Ingenieros, 1919; Podgorny, 1997, 2017; Casinos, 2012). He was cast as the archetype of the Argentine scientist, educated in the incipient public school system of the country, and an example for future generations (*e.g.*, Mercante & Ambrosetti, 1913; Mercante, 1916; Ingenieros, 1919; Frenguelli, 1934; Senet, 1934; Cabrera, 1944). Several leftist political groups also seized on his evolutionary versus creationist thinking as embodying the values of free thought and laicism (Reig, 1961; Perazzi, 2010; Casinos, 2012; Podgorny, 2017). The main, but certainly not only, architect of this “laic sanctification” (*sensu* Podgorny, 1997) of Ameghino was the socialist journalist Alfredo J. Torcelli (1864–1936), for whom little biographical information is available (Buonuome, 2017). According to Gabriel (1940), Torcelli was a close friend of Ameghino, and they conversed together in *zenéise*, the main dialect of Liguria. Torcelli was also a good friend of the Ameghino family and in 1912 accepted the proposal of Florentino’s younger brothers, Juan (1859–1932) and Carlos (1865–1936), to compile the works of the late-lamented paleontologist (Podgorny, 1997), which resulted in Torcelli’s monumental “*Obras completas y correspondencia científica de Florentino Ameghino*” (Torcelli, 1913–1936).

Soon after Ameghino’s death, the cult of his personality shifted to his alleged native town of Luján, where he was supposedly born on September 18th, 1854. Luján was already known to paleontologists, as the surrounding deposits had yielded the remains of the first vertebrate ever described as a fossil, the specimen of a giant ground sloth christened *Megatherium americanum* by the famous French anatomist Cuvier (1769–1832) in 1796. During the first half of the 19th century, a Late Pleistocene fauna was collected in Luján by Francisco Javier Muñiz (1795–1871) who, between 1846 and 1847, was consulted by Darwin on the origin of the “*vaca ñata*” in the pampas (Feijoó & Vizcaíno, 1999). Ameghino was clearly inspired by Muñiz’s efforts in the study of the Luján deposits and their fossil content (Toledo, 2011), as Ameghino himself acknowledged with gratitude (Fariña *et al.*, 2013). Eventually, this remarkably rich fauna served as the basis for the homonymous South American Land Mammal Age (*i.e.*, the Lujanian SALMA; Fariña *et al.*, 2013). But Luján was a locality held sacred by others besides paleontologists. Indeed, during 1911, and the first years of

the Ameghinian cult, this small town witnessed the construction of an impressive Christian church (erected between 1890 and 1935), named Basílica Nacional de Nuestra Señora de Luján in 1930. This monumental temple was built to replace a smaller church that had housed Our Lady of Luján (a statue of the Virgin Mary). The legend goes that the image itself decided that Luján would be its final destination: while being transported in 1630 on a long journey by ox cart, the statue is said to have miraculously increased its own weight in the nearby locality of Pilar to the point of being almost immovable (Salvaire, 1885; Durán, 2012). Today, the Basílica is still a sanctuary for Catholics, and a popular destination for pilgrimages (Iglesias & Lanson, 2010).

Thus, the sacred and “profane” made strange bedfellows in Luján over several decades of the 19th and 20th centuries. The construction of the Basílica of Luján, conceived in the early 1880s and begun in 1890, was framed in the context of the tensions between Laicism and Catholicism (Marquiegui, 2002). In the early 1880s, a revival of the story of the Virgin of Luján (*e.g.*, Salvaire, 1885) served as the main driving force for the construction of the imposing building (Marquiegui, 2002). Significantly, its erection began shortly after completion of the Museo de La Plata, conceived following an architectural design that reflected an evolutionary scheme (Moreno, 1889; Sheets-Pyenson, 1988). Indeed, many of the buildings of this period are manifestations of the opposing religious beliefs and the advance of liberalism (Marquiegui, 2002).

We cannot assert that Ameghino was fervently anticlerical, but as a younger man he leaned toward atheism more than in later life (see letter to L. A. Morh in Torcelli, 1913–1936, vol. 20, pp. 420–422) and it was a more youthful Ameghino (Fig. 1) that entered the fray (Perazzi, 2010; Casinos, 2012) by way of an article, titled “*Una virgen falsificada*” (A falsified virgin), that appeared in the Buenos Aires newspaper *La Crónica* on September 4th, 1884 (it was reprinted in full by Torcelli, 1916, Appendix 1). In this caustic article, Ameghino, under the pseudonym of Dr. Serafín Esteco, wrote that the image of the Virgin of Luján was a terracotta dressed as a harlequin, incapable of any miracle and mainly venerated by people with angular, narrow, and flattened foreheads, a physical feature indicative of diseased brains such as those

found among the lower races, and due to a retarded development that produced a reversion toward an ape-like condition, which was a view then commonly accepted (Novoa & Levine, 2010). Moreover, Ameghino pointed out that the statue was formed from white calcareous sandstone with fragments of quartzite and mica and the readily recognizable remains of three freshwater mollusc species (see Torcelli, 1916, Appendix 1). Its composition thus clearly revealed its local fabrication, in contrast to its supposedly distant origin, thus refuting its miraculous history (see Torcelli, 1916, Appendix 1). The identity, long disputed, of the article's author was revealed as Ameghino (Torcelli, 1936; Perazzi, 2010; Casinos, 2012; Durán, 2012), as he admitted personally, though not publicly, in 1898 (see letter to J. A. Scotto in Torcelli, 1913–1936, vol. 21, p. 727).

Immediately following Ameghino's death (which occurred in the year following the inauguration and consecration of the Basílica of Luján; Durán, 2012) many initiatives were proposed for centering the cult of the scientist in his

alleged hometown, including a statue in his honor, a public library carrying his name, and the public purchase of his house (Perazzi, 2010), all with the aim of establishing Luján as a destination of "laic pilgrimage" (Podgorny, 2014). It was in this context that more conservative elements went on the offensive and took direct aim at Ameghino's origins and scientific reputation in an anonymous pamphlet printed in 1916 by the Catholic Newspaper *El Pueblo*. This publication (Anonymous, 1916) opened with a long compilation of Ameghino's scientific errors and the numerous criticisms levelled at him during his life in order to depict him as a mediocre scientist, and further claimed his work as superficial and his character as rebellious.

Anonymous (1916) provided extensive coverage of Ameghino's confrontations with the German scientist Carlos (Carl Hermann Conrad) Burmeister (1807–1892) and the Argentine explorer Francisco Pascasio Moreno (1852–1919) during their tenure as director of the natural history museums of Buenos Aires and La Plata, respectively. The enduring animosity between Ameghino and Burmeister was, indeed, well known and their disputes carried out in the published literature often crossed the line between the personal and scientific (Márquez Miranda, 1951; Casinos, 2012). Burmeister repeatedly attacked Ameghino, criticized his anatomical knowledge and exaggerated taxonomic proliferation, dismissing his efforts as those of a self-taught, vague, and ignorant scholar (Anonymous, 1916). In the year before his death, Burmeister (1891) launched his final diatribe, charging that Ameghino had never been educated in a good or a scientific school, because he had come to Argentina from Genova with his family as a small child, his only formal education having been that received from the municipal school of the small town of Luján, and that he "ascended" only to assume a position of teacher at the same educational level in the town of Mercedes. The degree of Burmeister's (1891, p. 487) vehemence is evident in that he ended his attacks with a self-exculpatory proclamation: "*Dixi et salvavi animam meam*" (I have spoken and saved my soul; Burmeister, 1891, p. 487).

Anonymous (1916) therefore asserted not only that Ameghino was not of the caliber, in terms of scientific rigor and integrity, deserving of public recognition in Luján, but further claimed that the local Catholic register had no record

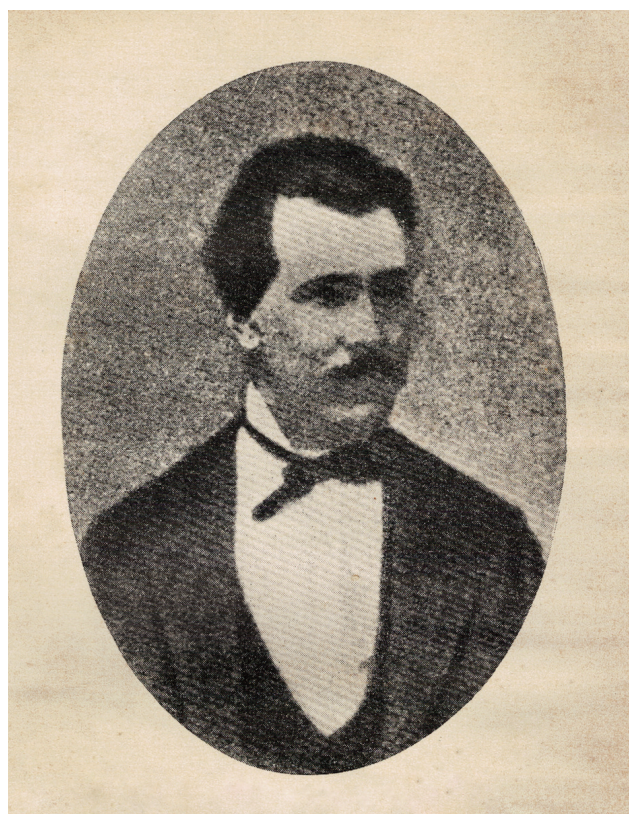


Figure 1. Daguerreotype of Florentino Ameghino in early 1878, before his trip to Europe. Modified from Márquez Miranda (1951).

of a birth certificate for Ameghino, casting doubt on Ameghino as a son of Luján. On the contrary, Anonymous (1916) attempted to portray him as a foreigner, in illustrating a transcription of an Italian birth certificate issued in 1915 by the church of San Saturnino di Moneglia (Liguria, northwestern Italy) under the auspices of the Archiepiscopal Curia of Genova (Anonymous, 1916; see also Casinos, 2012, fig. 3.1). This certificate reports the birth of a child, Giovanni Battista Fiorino Giuseppe Ameghino, with Antonio Ameghino and Maria Dina Armanini as parents, in Moneglia on September 19th, 1853. This document alone may have altogether avoided the controversy, but it unfortunately had the opposite effect.

In fact, Torcelli (1916) fiercely and to the bitter end (see also Torcelli, 1936) defended an Argentine origin for Ameghino in "*La nacionalidad de Ameghino*," and argued that the absence of Ameghino's birth certificate in Luján was suspicious. According to Torcelli's (1916) logic, the priests must have suspected that Ameghino, who in 1884 was among the few geological experts of the region, was behind the article, alluded to above, that appeared in *La Crónica* and later destroyed his birth certificate "in an act of revenge". However, D'Auria (1982) later verified that Lujan's parochial records, comprised of complete folios, show no signs of tampering. Torcelli (1916), in questioning the evidence of the Italian birth certificate (D'Auria, 1982, provided a reproduction of the original), drew attention to two contradictions between it and other biographical information on Ameghino. First, the spelling of Fiorino is not even close (or so Torcelli claimed) to Florentino and, second, September 19th does not coincide with September 18th, the date always celebrated by the family as the birthday of Florentino. Rebuffing Burmeister's attacks, given his enmity towards Ameghino, required little effort: Torcelli (1916) simply cast him as a biliary and senile creationist, who, having run out of scientific arguments, resorted to desperate and unfounded personal attacks. As a final piece of evidence, Torcelli (1916) presented a document that Ameghino supplied to journalists who came to the Museo Nacional de Buenos Aires to interview him; it included a short autobiographical section that began: "*Florentino Ameghino nació en el pueblo de Luján (Prov. B. Aires) el 18 de Septiembre de 1854*" (Florentino Ameghino was born in the town of Luján (Province of

Buenos Aires) on September 18th, 1854; Torcelli, 1916, p. 109). Consequently, then, through Torcelli's written words, Ameghino's voice was finally heard; a commemorative plaque was mounted on his modest family home in Luján later that same year (Podgorny, 1997) and the debate was considered closed (Torcelli, 1916, 1936).

Considerable other evidence has been brought to bear on this issue, but none of it can be considered definitive. This includes the anecdotal testimonies of citizens of Luján, some of whom remembered the young Ameghino as having arrived in Luján with his parents, while others as having been born there (Anonymous, 1916; Torcelli, 1916); and the various military and civil documents that Ameghino himself compiled in Argentina, some of which report an age that agrees with his birth in 1853, whereas others can only be explained by his birth in 1854 (Anonymous, 1916; Torcelli, 1916). The only undeniable aspect is that this issue, despite having been extensively treated, has never been completely resolved (*e.g.*, Gabriel, 1940; Marquiegui, 2011; Casinos, 2012; Podgorny, 2014).

In a recent contribution, Vanni *et al.* (2020) investigated the private correspondence of the Italian anthropologist, geologist and paleontologist Giovanni Capellini (1833–1922) to collect historical data on the South American fossil mammal collection housed in the Museo Geologico Giovanni Capellini (Bologna, Italy). Their analysis recovered, from the Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio di Bologna (BCABO), Fondo Speciale "Giovanni Capellini" (FSGC), an unpublished message from Ameghino to Capellini, hereafter referred to as the "note," in which Ameghino himself discloses important autobiographical data, undoubtedly revealing his birth in Moneglia in 1853. The news of the discovery of this note has been alluded to in recent publications (Podgorny, 2020, 2021; Toledo, 2020) but a detailed discussion of the subject is still needed. In the present contribution, Ameghino's note is illustrated, translated, and analyzed in its historical context. Furthermore, we report new unpublished documentation from the Archivio di Stato di Genova-Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali e per il Turismo (MIBACT) that supports the content of the note and sheds new light on this longstanding debate.

FIorentINO'S NOTE

Ameghino's note to Capellini (BCABo, FSGC. b. II, f. 35, undated) is here illustrated (Figs. 2–3) and translated:

Mr. Prof. Giovanni Capellini

Dear Sir.

This is my position.

I was born in 53 in the Municipality of Moneglia, near Chiavari.

In 55, at the age of 18 months, I was taken to Buenos Aires by my parents, where I was educated, dedicating myself particularly to the study of anthropology, geology and paleontology.

I am determined to continue my scientific work in the environs of the La Plata [River], where I believe that at my age I will have ample opportunity to contribute usefully to science.

I would now like to secure my exemption from military service from the Ministry of War, so that I can visit Italy, its museums, and foster relationships with its scientists, committing myself to enrich Italian museums with objects from those lands that may be of special interest.

In short, I believe that I can be more useful to my country in science than with weapons, that if there is no way to obtain an exemption I would not go to Italy, and that on my return to Buenos Aires I would be obliged to bow to the wishes of the populace of Mercedes, which indeed considers me as one of its favorite citizens, taking Argentine citizenship.

If there is a way to obtain this exemption, I hope you will be kind enough to let me know. After the Exhibition, I will not forget to leave a token to the Geological Museum of Bologna.

Yours most devoted

Fiorentino Ameghino

Ameghino's note (Figs. 2–3) is not dated (see next section). It was written on two separate sheets that were folded three or four times: the first sheet is laid out vertically (Fig. 2), whereas the second horizontally (Fig. 3) (see also Supplementary Information). In this note, without any preamble, Ameghino explains his circumstances: that of an Italian citizen, born in Moneglia in 1853, who needs an exemption from Italian military service. With an exemption, he would be able to move freely across the Italian territory without the risk of being retained for military service. In the event of not obtaining it, he would be forced to return to

Argentina, obtain Argentine citizenship, and then enter Italy as an Argentinian.

At the very end of the note, Ameghino signed using the Italian version of his name, "Fiorentino" (Fig. 3). As far as we know, this is the only document in which Ameghino uses "Fiorentino" instead of the Spanish version "Florentino." Indeed, even in a subsequent 1881 letter to the same Capellini (BCABo, FSGC. b. II, f. 35. 1881, Fig. 4) or to another Italian, such as the museum technician Santiago Pozzi (Castello, 2012), Ameghino signed as "Florentino."

Calligraphic scrutiny of this note with other documents written by Ameghino leaves few (if any) doubts on its attribution to the Argentine paleontologist (Figs. 2–4). Ameghino's note (Figs. 2–3) and letter (Fig. 4) to Capellini appear to have been handwritten by a native Spanish speaker who was fluent in Italian, but not used to writing in this language. In fact, he made errors common to a native Spanish speaker untrained in written Italian, using, for example, "*scientifici*" (Fig. 2) instead of "*scientifici*" ("chi" in Spanish and "ci" in Italian are pronounced similarly but are written differently). Moreover, he repeatedly omitted the double consonants typical of the Italian language (e.g., "*eco*" instead of "*ecco*" or "*metermi*" instead of "*mettermi*") or substituted them with Spanish-like forms (e.g., "*obtenere*" instead of "*ottenere*"). Finally, the writer demonstrates some knowledge of French, as he translated the Spanish word "*como*" (i.e., like) as the French "*comme*," instead of the Italian "*come*" (Fig. 2). From an early age, Ameghino almost certainly spoke *zenéise* and also became fluent in Italian, likely the languages spoken in the family home; he also learned French from one of his teachers, Javier Tapie, at his Lujanian school (Márquez Miranda, 1951; Casinos, 2012).

AMEGHINO AND CAPELLINI

The work of Ameghino is deeply rooted in Argentina, where he lived for nearly all of his life. He traveled to Europe between 1878 and 1881, mainly residing in France where he married a French woman, Léontine Poirier (Casinos, 2012). On his departure from Europe, Ameghino was a young and promising researcher (Fig. 1), seeking new contacts and international recognition (Márquez Miranda, 1951; Casinos, 2012). His participation in the 1878 *Exposition Universelle* in Paris was an opportunity to increase his visi-


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 Signor Prof. Giovanni Capellini
 Pregiatissimo signore.
 Goda già la mia posizione!
 Sono nato del '53 nella Comune di Monz-
 lid, presso Chiavari.
 Il 25 d'età di 18 mesi veniva trasportato a Buenos
 Aires dai miei genitori, dove mi sono educato, dedi-
 candomi particolarmente alle studio dell'anatomia, zoologia,
 geologia e paleontologia.
 Sono deciso a continuare i miei lavori scientifici nelle
 contrade del Plata, dove credo che a la mia età
 avrò tempo per far qualche cosa di utile per
 la scienza.
 Adesso desidererei ottenere dal ministero della
 guerra la mia eccezione dal servizio militare,
 per potere visitare l'Italia, i suoi musei, e in
 termini in relazione con i suoi scienziati, con
 promettermi di mia parte ad arricchire i musei
 italiani con degli oggetti di quelle contrade
 che possono avere un interesse speciale.
 In definitiva, credo che più utile possa essere
 alla mia patria nella scienza che nelle armi,
 che se non ce mezzo per ottenere la mia eccezione
 non andrò in Italia, e che di ritorno a Buenos
 Aires sarò obbligato a condiscender desidererei
 della popolazione di Mercedes che di fatto mi
 considera come uno dei suoi pedicellotti
 cittadini, prendendole carta di cittadinanza.

Figure 2. Note from Florentino Ameghino to Giovanni Capellini (BCABo, FSGC. b. II, f. 35, undated), first page (continues in Fig. 3). With the permission of Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio, Bologna.

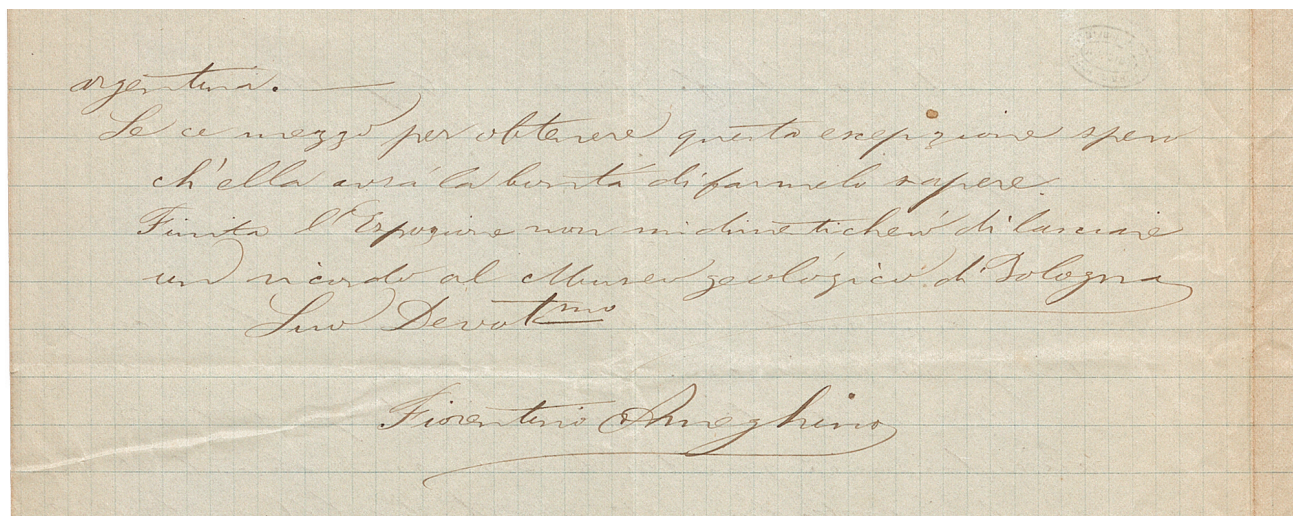


Figure 3. Note from Florentino Ameghino to Giovanni Capellini (BCABo, FSGC. b. II, f. 35, undated), second page (continues from Fig. 2). With the permission of Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio, Bologna.

bility, meet several scientists at numerous conferences, and display and sell some South American fossil specimens (Márquez Miranda, 1951; Casinos, 2012). Ameghino took part in two meetings held in Paris between August and September 1878, one on anthropology (August 16th–21st), the other on geology (August 29th to September 4th); in the former, he presented a contribution, *L'Homme préhistorique dans le bassin de la Plata* (Various Authors, 1880a, b).

The vice-president of both meetings was Capellini (Various Authors, 1880a, b). By that time, Capellini was a well-recognized geologist and a full professor at the Università degli Studi di Bologna (Vai, 2002). He was born into a low to middle-class family and was the first geologist from Bologna without a link to the nobility (Vai, 2002). Although he also supported Darwin's ideas on evolution and thus held progressive scientific views, Capellini was openly conservative as a person (Vai, 2002).

Ameghino and Capellini therefore met in Paris in 1878 and all the evidence suggests that this was their only encounter. In the last letter sent by Capellini to Ameghino in 1909 (Torcelli, 1913–1936, vol. 23, p. 254), the Italian geologist wrote:

Gentilissimo Sign., Ameghino,

Le sono molto grato e riconoscente per essersi ricordato di me dopo molti anni che ebbi il piacere di incontrarlo a Parigi e sono lietissimo di sapere che Ella è il degno successore del mio antico

amico Burmeister nell'importantissimo Museo di Buenos Aires. ...
[Dear Sir, Ameghino,

I am very grateful and obliged to you for having remembered me so many years after I had the pleasure of meeting you in Paris and I am delighted to know that you are the worthy successor of my old friend Burmeister in the important Museum of Buenos Aires Aires. ...].

In the correspondence of Ameghino edited by Torcelli, there are two other letters sent by Capellini. In the first, dated April 30th, 1879 (Torcelli, 1913–1936, vol. 20, p. 62), Capellini wrote:

... Fui dispiacentissimo di non poter fare per Lei cosa alcuna, secondo che Ella desiderava; come Ella sa, non vi è modo di sottrarsi alla legge.

Quel che credo si potrebbe ottenere sarebbe di fare il servizio come addetto a un ospedale; per questo bisognerebbe informarsi bene prima e dal Console italiano a Parigi potrebbe avere tutte le notizie che desidera.

[... I was very sorry that I was unable to do anything with regard to your request; as you know, there is no getting around the law.

What I believe might be a resolution would be to serve as a hospital attendant; but you should seek the advice of the Italian consul in Paris who should have all the information you need.].

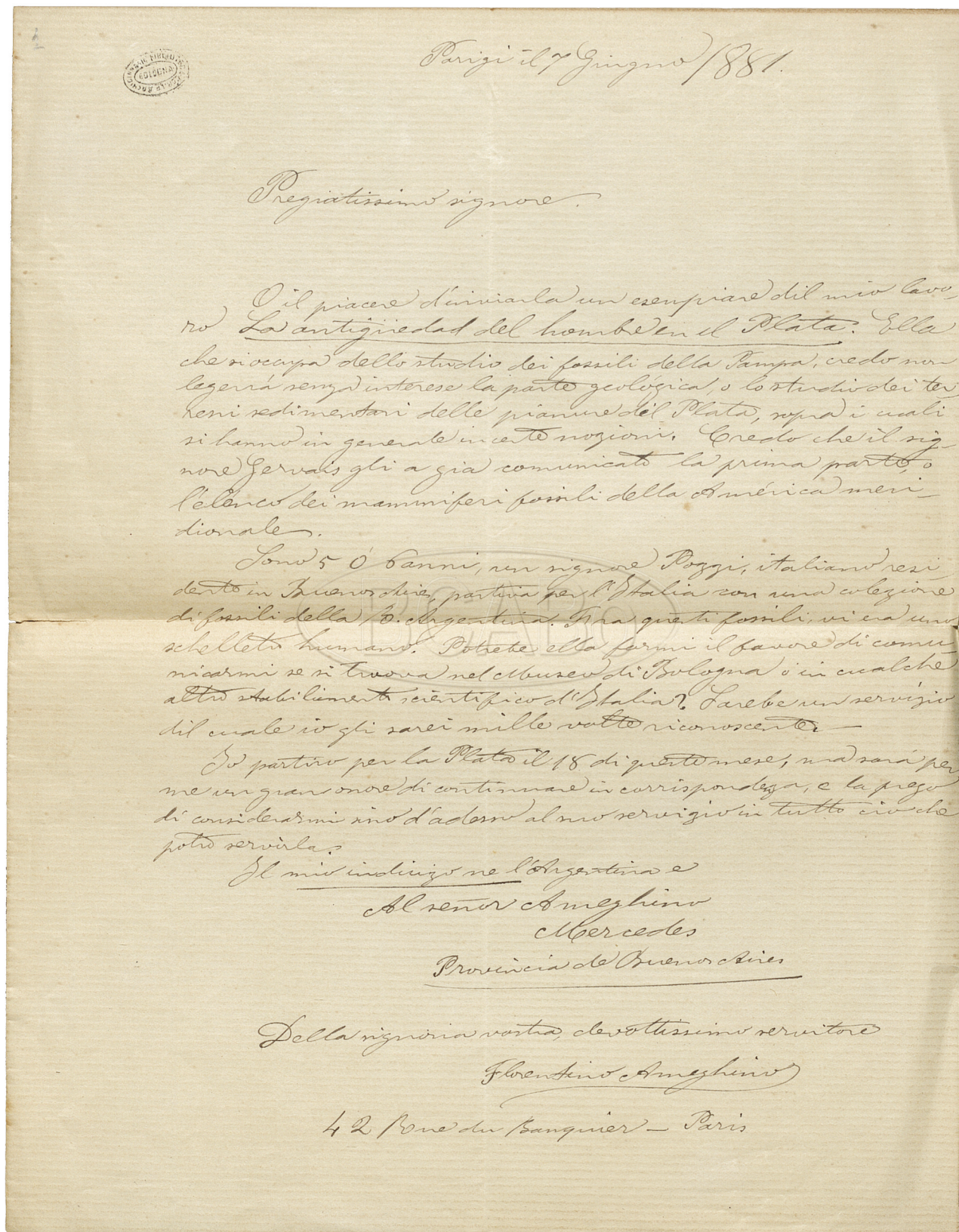


Figure 4. Original (1881) letter of Florentino Ameghino to Giovanni Capellini (BCABO, FSGC. b. II, f. 35, 1881). With the permission of Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio, Bologna.

This letter of Capellini, clearly in reply to Ameghino's note (Figs. 2–3), indicates that the latter was written before the end of April 1879. Also, given the sensitive nature of Ameghino's request for assistance, the direct yet informal tone of the note and the fact that Ameghino and Capellini had met during the meetings noted above, it is highly probable that the two scientists discussed the issue before Ameghino wrote his note. The absence of a date on the note also suggests that Ameghino may have delivered it by hand to Capellini when they met in Paris in 1878, rather than having posted it as a letter. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that the sheets were folded several times, presumably for fitting them into a pocket as opposed to an envelope (Figs. 2–3; see also Supplementary Information). A copy of Ameghino's note to Capellini is missing from Torcelli's edited compilation of Ameghino's scientific work and correspondence; this is understandable, as the note was in Capellini's possession and Ameghino was unlikely to have made (or kept) a copy of his own note. However, Capellini's letter in response to the note is included. It is unclear whether Torcelli grasped its significance; he may have guessed (fairly easily, in our opinion) from Capellini's reply the nature of Ameghino's concerns, and indeed may have learned about them from Ameghino. It is tempting, considering Torcelli's vigorous defense of Argentina as Ameghino's place of birth, to conjecture that Torcelli intentionally omitted either a copy of his note (had one existed) or a fuller explanation (had he been aware of Ameghino's concerns) on the nature of Capellini's response, but there is no objective evidence supporting such suppositions. Instead, Torcelli (1913–1936, vol. 20, p. 575) remarked only that Capellini's letter was an answer to "*a consulta de carácter personal*" (a personal matter) and apparently did not investigate the issue further. Indeed, Torcelli hastily published Ameghino's personal correspondence between 1935 and 1936, just before his death in 1936, and could not provide a detailed analysis of the paleontologist's voluminous correspondence (Márquez Miranda, 1951).

By contrast, a copy of Ameghino's 1881 letter to Capellini, the original of which is archived in the BCABo (Fig. 4), was reported by Torcelli (1913–1936, vol. 20, p. 209) with grammatical corrections. In this letter, dated June 8th, 1881, Ameghino announced that he would return

to Argentina a few days later, on June 18th. Capellini, thus aware that Ameghino would miss the second meeting of the International Geological Congress (Bologna, September–October 1881) presided over by Capellini (Vai, 2004), replied to express regret over his absence but suggested that he nonetheless register for the meetings (Torcelli, 1913–1936, vol. 20, p. 212). Following this advice, Ameghino paid the registration fee (Torcelli, 1913–1936, vol. 20, p. 185) and was included among the Congress members (Various Authors, 1882).

THE ENDS AND THE MEANS

The June 8, 1881 letter from Ameghino to Capellini (Fig. 4) includes another important passage:

... Sono 5 ò 6 anni, un signore Pozzi, italiano residente in Buenos Aires, partiva per l'Italia con una collezione di fossili della R. Argentina. Fra questi fossili, vi era uno schelletto humano. Potrebe ella farmi il favore di comunicarmi se si trova nel Museo di Bologna o in qualche altro stabilimento scientifico d'Italia? Sarebe un servizio dil quale io gli sarei mille volte riconoscente.

[... 5 or 6 years ago, a Mr. Pozzi, an Italian living in Buenos Aires, left for Italy with a collection of fossils from the Argentine Republic. Among these fossils was a human skeleton. Could you please let me know if it is in the Museum of Bologna or in some other scientific institution in Italy? It would be a service for which I would be a thousand times grateful.].

Ameghino refers here to Antonio Pozzi (1822–1898), a former taxidermist of the Museo Civico di Storia Naturale di Milano (Vanni *et al.*, 2020). Pozzi was hired by the Museo Público de Buenos Aires in 1866 but a few years later, after a conflict with Burmeister, he was fired and he focused on selling fossil remains, especially to Italian institutions (García *et al.*, 2015; Vanni *et al.*, 2020). An 1872 letter from Pozzi to Ameghino reveals an already established relationship between them (Torcelli, 1913–1936, vol. 20, p. 14). During this period Ameghino was already sending fossils to Pozzi. The latter, complaining of their bad state of preservation, offered to teach him excavation techniques (Torcelli, 1913–1936, vol. 20, p. 14). Ameghino then wrote to Pozzi on December 24th, 1874 (Torcelli, 1913–1936, vol. 20, p. 21):

... Ho risolto pubblicare tutti i miei lavori e scoprimenti sopra questa materia in un lavoro che stò compilando e che avrà per titolo "L'antichità dell'uomo nelle pampe argentine".

Come ella mi disse che nel Museo di Milano esiste lo scheletro umano fossile che ho trovato sono già varii anni non lontano dalla città di Mercedes e del quale me ne sono disfatto perchè a quel tempo non pensavo fare degli studi serii sopra la materia, approfittando la sua gita in Italia, la prego di farmi il favore di presentarsi personalmente al Sgn. professore Stoppani, farli ostensibili i dati che le do in questa lettera ed altri ch'ella crederà opportuni, e chiederli che mi faccia il favore d'inviarmi una descrizione anatomica di detto scheletro per pubblicarla nel lavoro su accennato.

[... I've resolved to publish all my works and discoveries on this topic in a contribution that I am preparing and which will be titled "The antiquity of man in the Argentine pampas".

As you've told me that the Museum of Milan contains the fossil human skeleton that I found years ago not far from the city of Mercedes and that I did not retain, thinking as I did at the time that I would not undertake serious study of the subject, and given your trip to Italy, I ask that you do me the favor of personally visiting Sir professor Stoppani, conveying to him the information that I provide in this letter and any other information that you deem relevant, and ask him to do me the favor of sending me an anatomical description of that skeleton for its publication in the aforementioned work.].

During his stay in Europe several years later, Ameghino wrote the following to Emilio Cornalia (1824–1882), the director of the Museo Civico di Storia Naturale di Milano between 1866 and 1882 (Torcelli, 1913–1936, vol. 20, p. 101):

Pregiatissimo signore:

Or sono cinque o sei anni, un signor Pozzi, italiano, residente a Buenos Aires, parti di là per l'Italia, con una collezione di fossili de la R. Argentina. Fra questi fossili v'era uno scheletro d'uomo.

Potrebbe ella farmi il favore di comunicarmi se questo scheletro si trova nel Museo Civico di Milano, od in qualche altro Museo d'Italia?

Sarebbe un servizio del quale io gli sarei mille volte riconoscente. Senza altro, sono il vostro umile servitore.

Florentino Ameghino

[Dearest Sir:

Five or six years ago, Mr. Pozzi, an Italian residing in Buenos Aires, left for Italy with a collection of fossils from the Argentine Republic. Among these fossils there was a human skeleton.

Would you do me the favor of informing me if this skeleton is in the Civic Museum of Milan, or in some other museum in Italy?

It would be a service for which I would be a thousand times grateful to you.

Of course, I remain your humble servant.

Florentino Ameghino].

Cornalia answered in the negative (Torcelli, 1913–1936, vol. 20, p. 102):

Preg.^{mo} Signore:

... Fu nel 1872 che io feci un primo acquisto dal sig.^r Pozzi, di fossili delle Pampas.

... Ebbene. Fra tutti questi pezzi non vi fu mai nessun osso appartenente a scheletro umano –e molto meno di uno scheletro d'uomo. Di ciò posso assicurarla.

... Non mi consta ove possa essere un tal scheletro umano. Prima di venire a Milano il Sig.^r Pozzi si fermó a Genova e in altre città, ove può averlo venduto. Io non lo vidi mai assieme alle ossa da me acquistate.

[Dearest Sir:

... I first purchased fossils of the Pampas from Mr. Pozzi in 1872.

... Well then. Among these pieces there were no human bones, let alone the skeleton of a man. Of this I can assure you.

... I don't know where such a human skeleton could be. Before coming to Milan, Mr. Pozzi stopped in Genoa and other cities, where he may have sold it. I did not note it among the bones I bought.].

Ameghino, however, persisted and on June 7, 1881, just a few days before his departure for Argentina, wrote (Torcelli, 1913–1936, vol. 20, p. 209):

Al professore Emilio Cornalia.

Pregiatissimo signore:

... Non ho potuto procurarmi nessuna notizia sopra lo scheletro d'uomo che il Pozzi portò in Italia. Eppure lo scheletro deve trovarsi in qualche luogo d'Italia. Lo scheletro esiste perchè io lo vidi a Buenos Aires prima della partenza del Pozzi.

[To Professor Emilio Cornalia.

Dearest Sir:

... I have been unable to obtain any information on the human skeleton that Pozzi brought to Italy. And yet the skeleton must be located somewhere in Italy. The skeleton exists because I saw it in Buenos Aires before Pozzi's departure.].

In his letter (dated June 12, 1881) of response, Cornalia (Torcelli, 1913–1936, vol. 20, p. 211–212) did not provide any further information. Capellini, the day after (June 13, 1881; Torcelli, 1913–1936, vol. 20, p. 212–213), was also unable to be of further help:

... Gli oggetti portati dal Pozzi furono acquistati dal Museo di Milano.

... Scriverò al Direttore del Museo Civico di Milano e se avrò notizie interessanti per ciò che desidera la informerò.

[... The objects brought by Pozzi were purchased by the Museum of Milan.

... I will write to the Director of the Civic Museum of Milan and if I have relevant news on your matter of interest I will inform you.].

Ameghino's letters to Pozzi, Capellini, and Cornalia reveal his dogged search for the well-preserved human skeleton that he had recovered many years earlier. Ameghino donated (or more probably sold) it at a period during his life when he had no plans to dedicate his efforts to human evolution. According to Politis and Bonomo (2011), this skeleton, the whereabouts of which have never been resolved, was found by Ameghino when he was only 16 years old. With regard to this skeleton, all the information that Ameghino had available indicated that it was in Italy and most probably in Milan. However, the realization of the improbability of locating these human remains and of obtaining an exemption from military service were determining factors in Ameghino's decision to steer clear of Italy. Avoiding military service was imperative, as it would have

been a major obstacle to Ameghino's career. In Italy, military service became mandatory in 1862 for all Italian men born since 1842 (Lamioni, 2002) and legislation that came into effect required a total of 12 years of conscription, three of actual service and nine as furlough time (Lamioni, 2002). Indeed, evidence reveals that Ameghino's concerns were not unfounded. The "*Liste di estrazione di Chiavari classe 1853, vol. 887*" (Extraction List of Chiavari class of 1853, vol. 887), obtained from the MIBACT (see Supplementary Information), indicates those individuals, born in 1853, conscripted to serve in the Italian military. The list reveals Giovanni Battista Fiorino Giuseppe Ameghino of Moneglia as a conscript and declares that he had failed to report for duty in December 1873. The list, in fact, reports him as a "*renitente*" (draft dodger; see Supplementary Information). It seems likely that Ameghino would have been fully aware that he had been conscripted.

Ameghino thus was unable to attend (although he had registered for) the second International Geological Congress held in Bologna. Although several authors (e.g., Mercante, 1916; Senet, 1934; Gabriel, 1940; Casinos, 2012) have listed Italy among the countries that Ameghino visited during his European stay, there is no documented evidence of a trip to Italy in his correspondence (Mercante & Ambrosetti, 1913; Ingenieros, 1919; Cabrera, 1944; Márquez Miranda, 1951). Accordingly, D'Auria's (1982) investigations indicated that Ameghino returned to Argentina accompanied by his wife and without having visited his country of birth.

A GENIUS AS A FUNCTION OF THE SETTING

Based on the new evidence provided in the note (Figs. 2–3), Ameghino's return to Argentina in 1881 does not represent his first voyage to South America; rather, his first transatlantic trip occurred at the age of only 18 months, whereas he was nearly 28 years old during his second journey. Over these three decades, however, both Italy and Argentina experienced profound social and political transformations. In 1853, when Ameghino was born in Moneglia, Liguria was part of the Kingdom of Sardinia (Devoto, 2006). It was in this context that, a year and a half later, Fiorino embarked from Genova with his parents and crossed the Atlantic to reach the then State of Buenos Aires, where his name was changed to "Florentino". As the incorporation of

Buenos Aires to the then Confederación Argentina (1860–1861; thereafter República Argentina) and the formal establishment of the Kingdom of Italy (in 1861) lay in the future (Devoto, 2006), attributing Ameghino citizenship to one or the other based on his birthplace may seem rather trivial. However, already by the 1840s, Italy was considered, at least at the intellectual level, as a united entity, and the term “Italian” was preferred to “Genoese” or “Sardinian” by the Argentine elites (Devoto, 2006). Further, as several of Ameghino’s biographers have highlighted, the paramount importance of Argentina as backdrop to his life and work is undeniable (*e.g.*, Ingenieros, 1919; Márquez Miranda, 1951; Casinos, 2012). Be that as it may, the new evidence on Ameghino’s birthplace is relevant for another reason, as it helps comprehend how he has been perceived within a sociohistorical context.

Much has been made of economic and social factors in garnering support for perpetuating a perception of Ameghino as a self-educated genius of humble origins, who had to struggle to overcome limited academic and economic opportunity and institutional and social bias in rising to international recognition among the scientific elite, culminating in the figure of a near-mythical hero (*e.g.*, Mercante & Ambrosetti, 1913; Frenguelli, 1934; Cabrera, 1944; Márquez Miranda, 1951, 1957). Soon after his death, several obituaries, public homages and newspaper articles depicted Ameghino as a “poor”, “modest” and “simple” person (see a compendium in Torcelli, 1913–1936, vol. 1), all ideas that crystallized among his earlier biographers (*e.g.*, Ingenieros, 1919; Cabrera, 1944; Márquez Miranda, 1951). This early sanctification of Ameghino, sometimes resulting in true fanaticism, diminished in intensity in the following decades but remnants are still present (Reig, 1961; Podgorny, 1997; Perazzi, 2010; Casinos, 2012; Vilorio, 2014).

As with people generally, Ameghino’s was a complex personality, and to paint such a simplistic portrait does him a disservice. There is no doubting Ameghino’s intelligence and abilities and that his eventual recognition, both during his life and following his death, was well earned. However, more than a “*simple hombre de ciencia*” (simple man of science) (Torcelli, 1913–1936, vol. 1, p. 209), he was more likely a “*genio en función del medio*” (genius as a function of the setting), as Ingenieros (1919, p. 10) described him,

with a sort of “Lamarckian” ability to remarkably adapt to the changing fabric of his own sociohistorical context.

European migration to Argentina was promoted as a founding element of the emerging nation (Alberdi, 1852). Official Argentine data on immigration indicate that many involved in the mass exodus, between 1853 and 1863, from the Italian peninsula, particularly Liguria, landed in and near Buenos Aires (see below; Devoto, 2006). The 1855 census of Buenos Aires revealed that of this city’s 91,000 inhabitants, 36% were non-native (Devoto, 2006). Among them, Italians constituted the most populous foreign group (11% of the total), followed by French (7%) and Spanish (6%). The first Argentine national census of 1869 reported the presence of 71,442 Italians from a total population of 1,887,490 inhabitants (Devoto, 2006). They represented, by far, the largest group among foreign individuals (3.8% of the total), more than double those from Spain and France (the second and third largest groups at 1.8% and 1.7% of the total population, respectively). Further, 85% of the Italian immigrants were concentrated in the Province of Buenos Aires, thereby constituting an important presence in the region (Devoto, 2006). On the economic status of Ameghino’s family, while it may not have been well off, it is not at all clear that it was desperately or even moderately poor—the image of penniless immigrants arriving with only the clothes on their back does not seem to apply. To begin with, the family was able to emigrate to Argentina in 1855 and to buy, only two years later, their family home in Luján (Marquiegui, 2011). Ameghino’s original birth certificate (see D’Auria, 1982, p. 15) lists his father’s occupation as “*calzolaio*” (shoemaker or cobbler), a trade that at the time likely brought steady business. However, towards the end of the century, a solid technical-scientific foundation was specifically needed and actively sought by the newly created Argentine nation.

It is in this context that in 1862 Burmeister was named, under the government of Bartolomé Mitre (1821–1906), as director of the Museo Público de Buenos Aires, and proceeded to transform the institution according to European scientific standards (Sheets-Pyenson, 1988). The subsequent Argentine president, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811–1888), decided in 1873 to facilitate migration exclusively from northern Europe, and discourage that from Mediterranean regions, by opening dedicated immigration

agencies only in northern European countries (Devoto, 2006). It was within this context that the Latvian-Baltic German zoologist Carlos (Friedrich Wilhelm Karl) Berg (1843–1902) also came to Argentina in 1874 under the endorsement of both Burmeister and Sarmiento (Casinos, 2012).

By the early 1870s, Ameghino was a promising and brilliant young man, with a passion for paleontology that he cultivated during his childhood in Luján. His formal education was limited if compared to the academics that Argentina was welcoming to the country. However, the level of the compulsory education he received was remarkably high. The school system instituted by Sarmiento not only provided him with a good education but also his first stable jobs as an elementary school teacher in 1869 and director in 1871 (Márquez Miranda, 1951; Casinos, 2012). By that time, Ameghino had managed to collect and analyze several fossil remains and read and assimilated the works of Darwin, Lyell, and Burmeister. In 1875 he published his first work, titled "*Nouveaux debris de l'homme et de son industrie, mêlés a des ossements d'animaux quaternaires recueillis pres de Mercedes*" (Ameghino, 1875; see below) in the French *Journal de Zoologie*.

During 1875–1876 Ameghino undertook his first scientific discussions with Burmeister and encountered resistance in his attempt to publish his results on human evolution (Ingenieros, 1919; Cabrera, 1944; Márquez Miranda, 1951; Casinos, 2012). In 1876, Berg, Pedro N. Arata, and Moreno rejected Ameghino's manuscript for publication in the *Anales de la Sociedad Científica Argentina*, arguing that his conclusions on Quaternary deposits were not sufficiently supported and that the existence of fossil man in the pampas was doubtful (Ingenieros, 1919; Márquez Miranda, 1951; Casinos, 2012). With regard to Ameghino's first forays into publishing, two important aspects should be noted. His first publication (Ameghino, 1875) consists of the transcription of three paragraphs of a letter (see Torcelli, 1913–1936, vol. 20, p. 18–19) that Ameghino had sent to the French anatomist Paul Gervais (1816–1879). In that 1875 letter, Ameghino briefly outlined his discoveries and interpretations and requested further information on human fossils deposited in Paris, intending to include the information in a book he was planning to write on the antiquity of man in the pampas. Gervais was impressed with Ameghino's

preliminary results and decided to publish them, under Ameghino's name, in his *Journal de Zoologie* (Ameghino, 1875). Ameghino always considered this his first scientific contribution (Casinos, 2012), though it may more properly be viewed as a fortunate coincidence, rather than a real publication. On the other hand, the contribution proposed by Ameghino in 1876 was legitimately rejected by the *Sociedad Científica Argentina* for publication in its *Anales*, as it advanced, with the little data provided, unfounded hypotheses and premature generalizations (Ingenieros, 1919).

Evidently, during his early twenties, Ameghino encountered less resistance to his ideas in Europe than in Argentina, and so determined to seek support on the other side of the Atlantic. Encouragement from Paul Gervais and the occasion of the 1878 *Exposition Universelle* in Paris were thus determining factors in his decision to leave for Europe (Ingenieros, 1919; Márquez Miranda, 1951; Casinos, 2012). As a young man in his mid-twenties (Fig. 1), Ameghino managed to travel and live in Europe between 1878 and 1881, after obtaining financial support from some friends and members of the Genoese community in Argentina (Podgorny, 2005; Casinos, 2012). Among the scientists he met in France, Ameghino developed a particular familiarity with Capellini, with whom he shared his passion, language, and social beginnings. In a letter to Oscar Doering, Ameghino would later declare Capellini as "*el más distinguido de los naturalistas italianos existentes*" (the most distinguished of living Italian naturalists) (Torcelli, 1913–1936, vol. 20, p. 261). It is not surprising, then, that among the Italian scientists he met in Europe, Ameghino chose to confide in Capellini regarding his delicate personal circumstances (Figs. 2–3).

On his return to Argentina, together with members of his family, he opened a stationary bookshop, first in Buenos Aires and then in La Plata (Podgorny, 2005; Casinos, 2012). Considering this context, his selling of fossils (the ethics of which have long been debated, although the practice was then more commonly accepted than today) probably represented an option more than a necessity, which allowed certain financial stability and pursuit of his academic interests. Such opportunities and activities as outlined above, particularly during his times, do not suggest economic hardship.

During the decade of 1880–1890, Ameghino's prestige rose considerably, as did the number of his publications

(Márquez Miranda, 1951; Casinos, 2012). Over the same period, however, anti-Italian sentiment also increased, especially among the emerging Argentine elite (Devoto, 2006). These were also the years in which the new generation of Argentine scientists tried to secure the higher institutional positions that had previously been held by northern Europeans (Márquez Miranda, 1951). Although it cannot be said that true discrimination against Italians occurred in Argentina, it was extremely difficult at that time for an immigrant to gain access to the higher levels of society (Devoto, 2006). During this period, the anti-Italian hostility led to a generally unhealthy tendency among the sons of Italian immigrants to obsessively deny or obscure their origins and cultural identity (Devoto, 2006). Given the circumstances, Ameghino, particularly during the 1880s, may thus have been led to the impression that he would have had little chance in such an uphill struggle—except, perhaps, by obscuring his origins.

In his struggles with Burmeister, Ameghino allied himself with Moreno, but soon these two also quarreled (Márquez Miranda, 1951; Fernicola, 2011). It is worth noting that Ameghino's most prominent detractors, Burmeister and Moreno, symbolize the forces involved at the time, respectively representing northern European authority and the emerging Argentine elites, who were competing for the main scientific positions in the country. However, the fierce confrontations that Ameghino waged in life with many notable individuals of the time are also indicative of his short temper, which has ironically been attributed to his 'Italian blood' (Gabriel, 1940). When personal conflicts arose, whether started by him or by his detractors, Ameghino was rarely diplomatic or conciliatory. He did not temper in the least his hostility towards those, such as Burmeister and Moreno, who were conducting a "*guerra infame*" (infamous war) against him (see letter from Ameghino to Hermann von Ihering, in Torcelli, 1913–1936, vol. 21, p. 171). Conflict, though less heated, occurred with other scientists (Cabrera, 1944; Casinos, 2012), such as the British Richard Lydekker (1849–1915), the North American John Bell Hatcher (1861–1904), the German Arnold Edward Ortmann (1863–1927), and the Swiss Alcides (Alcide) Mercerat (?–1934). Mercerat and Santiago (Kaspar Jakob) Roth (1850–1924), the latter also originally from Switzerland, were the scientists suc-

cessively in charge of the vertebrate paleontology section of the Museo de la Plata, following Ameghino's dismissal by Moreno in 1888 (Vizcaíno, 2011; Casinos, 2012). Roth nearly fell into Ameghino's circle of enemies, but their previous friendship spared him from being reduced to a "*tenue polvo que se esparza a los cuatro vientos del territorio de la Pampa para aumentar así los sedimentos de ésta*" (fine dust that scatters to the four winds of the Pampean territory to deepen its sediments; see letter from Ameghino to Roth, in Torcelli, 1913–1936, vol. 21, p. 631). The fact that Ameghino's origins were introduced by Burmeister and echoed by Mercerat to inflame their confrontations (Torcelli, 1916, 1936) reveals some degree of contempt towards an Italian background during that particular sociohistorical context. Nonetheless, although his intentions were ignoble, Burmeister's claim was accurate. How Burmeister obtained this information is still an open question, although his 1890 travels to Italy, noted in the same publication that includes his final acrimonious attacks on Ameghino (Burmeister, 1891), may represent a possible lead.

In his later years, Sarmiento, by then a former president, senator, and minister, recognized Ameghino as the right man to replace Burmeister in leading the Museo Nacional de Buenos Aires, as the institution was then known (Babini, 1954). For Sarmiento, the time had finally come for a world-renowned Argentine scientist with a modern evolutionary mindset to lead the most important natural history institution of the country. Burmeister, though, had other plans and, shortly before his death in 1892, appointed Berg as his successor (Márquez Miranda, 1951; Babini, 1954; Casinos, 2012). Ten years later, however, Ameghino's prolific publication record could no longer be ignored, and he finally attained the long-sought position.

Ameghino was among the most prolific of Argentine paleontologists and left behind a great legacy and a vast amount of information in his numerous scientific publications. Nevertheless, he also left several unanswered questions on his private life and public persona. The analysis of these aspects requires additional investigation into his social and historical background, which affected not only his life but also how he came to be perceived. Considered in these contexts, the emerging figure of Florentino Ameghino is that of an Italian immigrant of humble origins, who could,

however, take advantage of many opportunities in the changing social, political, and economic fabric of his day. When he was young and perhaps more rebellious and eager for social and personal recognition, he challenged the religious establishment in Luján and shortly thereafter the scientific authorities of his time. In this struggle, Ameghino would have been expected to have used any means at his disposal, including hiding his foreign birth—unless, of course, it could somehow have been used to advantage.

CONCLUSIONS

The recent publication by Vanni *et al.* (2020) has brought to light a note written by Florentino Ameghino in the personal archives of the Italian scientist Giovanni Capellini. In this hand-written message, Ameghino revealed to Capellini that he was born in 1853 in Moneglia, northeastern Italy, and not in the town of Luján, as has been commonly accepted. This confirms the validity of the birth certificate issued after Ameghino's death, recording his name as Giovanni Battista Fiorino Giuseppe Ameghino, and extends the "antiquity of *the man in the Plata*" by a year to September 19th, 1853, rather than his conventionally recognized birthdate of September 18th, 1854. This new evidence is not only of historical value, but also sheds new light on the life, work, and personality of Ameghino, allowing consideration of these aspects in a sociohistorical context. When he first arrived in Argentina, Ameghino was an immigrant child, raised by a humble, working-class family with few intellectual and economic resources, but his economic situation and level of education were not limiting factors for his career. His life was marked by a constant need for prestige, recognition, and social ascent in a changing social and political environment that was at times unfavorable to Italian immigrants. However, if we wish to gain an accurate and unbiased perception of Ameghino both during and after his life, we suggest that certain aspects regarding him and some of his contemporaries should be more thoroughly and impartially considered. One of the aspects that has been firmly established in light of the new evidence is Ameghino's long questioned birthplace and birthdate. Even though this sort of information might be considered trivial, the matter is instead important because it helps to reveal a more accurate depiction of his personality and image.

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