Examining Commodity, Agency, and Value: Prehistoric French Replicas, Casts, and “Frauds” within the National Museum of Natural History’s Collection

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Chapter 1: Introduction

From approximately 1850 to the beginning of World War II, archaeological collaboration between the United States and France was at its peak in terms of the study of human prehistory. This span of time will be referred to as a “golden age” of exchange, which resulted in thousands of objects being sent from France to be housed in museums and institutions of higher education in the United States. Within these collections, the presence of replicas, casts, and even objects questionably catalogued by the museum as “frauds” highlight the underlying value of the broader collecting ideologies. Through a statistical analysis of the French prehistoric collections at the National Museum of Natural History that includes replicas, casts, and “frauds” as well as case studies into specific objects, I hope to explore the patterns of motivations and range of perspectives of the various actors within the process of creating, collecting, and distributing these objects. More in-depth, biographical case studies will also allow for a glimpse into the complex and often ambiguous social lives of certain objects within these collections (Kopytoff 1986). Overall, the presence of replicas, casts, and “frauds” becomes a lens into which commodity, agency, and value of the prehistoric French collections can be examined and analyzed.

Chapter 2: A Brief History of the “Golden Age” of Exchange

Although studied in various capacities since the mid-19th century, the field of archaeology in America grew with the establishment of formal academic relationships between Europe and America, ranging from archaeological research societies to Ivy League institutions to nascent museums like the United States National Museum, or what
is today the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of Natural History (Goodrum 2009). In both archaeology and anthropology, “collecting and displaying objects from cultures around the world was seen by many as contributing to a broader sense of human understanding” (Conn 1998: 99). Initially, the exchange of artifacts fulfilled the “educational roles” established by many museums and institutions (Barker 2010: 295).

As highlighted by Dietler (1994), however, early anthropology and archaeology in many cases supported the accepted sociopolitical frameworks that contributed to the identity of the French and by extension the Western world as a whole. Dietler (1994) argues that throughout the past few centuries the French have politically exploited their archaeological ties to the French landscape through either Gallic or Roman remains, yet antiquarianism and prehistoric archaeology provided even earlier evidence of the importance of France as the center of the emergence of modern, civilized humanity from primitiveness through complex artistic and technological innovations (Stocking 1987: 29). The archaeological record in France not only had a role in encouraging the progressive narratives of evolution but also in the societal notion of broader European supremacy within a colonial context, which added to the prehistoric materials value and agency in European and European American society.

By collecting prehistoric materials from the Old World and participating in an intellectual discussion with one of many European nations vying for recognition as the “apogee” of modern European progress, American institutions gained legitimacy among both European and other American institutions (Stocking 1987: 29; Petraglia and Potts 2004: xii). Some instances represent a reciprocal exchange, or partage, of “primitiveness” where some French institutions or collectors were interested in
paleontological or archaeological specimens excavated in the Americas or ethnographic materials from indigenous American populations in lieu of receiving payment for their prehistoric archaeological collections (Renfrew 2006: 21; Manias 2014; Accession 42207). For example, as will be discussed later in this work, prehistorians like Dr. Léon Henri Martin, most famously associated with the site of La Quina in southwestern France, preferred to exchange prehistoric archaeological materials for anatomical specimens for most of his career (Peabody and Hooton 1914: 258-259; Accession 55712). Thomas Wilson, eventual Curator of Prehistoric Anthropology at the Smithsonian Institution, however, during his travels as the United States Consul in Nice, France, suggested the *partage* method of exchange was not universal:

> In justification of my request for specimens I have to say that it when I visit a collection private or public where they may have many duplicates and be told 'no we do not sell, but we will exchange' and in the next place 'Yes we will sell or exchange, we will exchange these for others of equal value or we will sell these at such and such a price.' Then for want of articles to exchange I have to put my hand in my pocket and pay 20, 40 or 100 francs cash. My collection has cost me not far from 5000 francs & as much more in traveling expenses & yet I have no object which could not have been obtained in exchange for articles from the U.S. (Accession 42207).

Through both the intellectual and physical exchange of commodified artifacts, French artifacts were used to confer legitimacy to American institutions during the early days of the “golden age of exchange.”

The means of exchange swiftly changed as power dynamics shifted between France and the United States after World War I. According to White and Breitborde (1992), “the affluence in America coincided with a situation in which western Europe, and perhaps France in particular, was still reeling from the devastation of World War I” (31). French archaeologists and museums faced limitations in funding and “some severe
choices had to be made, often resulting in the breaking up of collections” in museums or private collections. After returning to archaeological work, many archaeologists modified their exchange policies for “a measure of financial security in very insecure times” (White and Breitborde 1992: 31). For example, a small collection of materials acquired in 1930 from the site of Le Roc de Sers were labeled as “purchased from Dr. Martin” within the University of Minnesota’s Department of Anthropology catalogs, indicating that the excavator of the site, Dr. Henri Martin as previously mentioned from La Quina, had changed his policy from exchange to commerce later in his career (University of Minnesota Department of Anthropology Archaeology Collections Catalog; Porter 2012: 31).

Many of the institutions “were buying Paleolithic materials beyond all reasonable teaching needs” due to the poor French economy after World War I and were in some cases purchasing items that were less than authentic (White and Breitborde 1992: 31). For example, approximately “21,500 Paleolithic artifacts were allowed to leave France” and move to Beloit College’s Logan Museum of Anthropology in Beloit, Wisconsin during the early 20th century (White and Breitborde 1992: 30). The prehistoric French collections at the University of Minnesota also contain potentially dubious specimens, including supposed “Azilian Painted Pebbles” from l’Abbé Henri Breuil that have been questioned by experts around the time the collection was purchased in 1930 and more recently (Porter 2012: 28-29; Bégouën 1929; Bahn et. al: 1987). The French prehistoric collections acquired by American institutions from French prehistorians and museums after World War I display the shift of institutional legitimacy from France to the United States through an increased ability to purchase commodified French artifacts (Manias
While both intellectual and material exchange continued between the United States and France, the Second World War and changing epistemological frameworks within the field of archaeology brought the “golden age of exchange” to a close.

Chapter 3: Implications of Commodity, Agency, and Value

An examination of the frequency of replicas, casts, and objects labelled as “frauds” within the prehistoric French collections in the National Museum of Natural History’s collections, suggests implications of commodity, agency, and value of this collecting ideology. The exchanged prehistoric French artifacts, both replicated or reconstructed ones and authentic archaeological specimens, were fetishized commodities. The commodification of the replicas and casts in part results from their role in the early practice of archaeology, that continues today, as objects used for research in place of actual specimens, which were often extremely rare, fragile, and difficult to visit via travel for archaeologists or students in the United States. Museums stood to gain reputations as centers of serious academic inquiry through acquiring comprehensive archaeological collections. In the most basic interpretation of Marx’s *Capital*, the commodification and exchange of some of mankind’s earliest products satisfies the “social want” of institutional legitimization and displays the “material relations between persons and social relations between things” (Marx 1867: 217-218). In the maturing capitalistic societies of both France and the United States in the mid to late 19th century, prevalent object-based epistemologies were the ultimate reflection of capitalism’s materialistic influence over academic culture.
The commodification of artifacts through exchange imbued them with an agency to legitimize not only the receiving individual or institution but also the sender. For example, the collection contains commercially made casts and replicas, like those from Dr. F. Krantz (Accession 50314 and 104831), and those created and distributed by celebrated prehistorians, like Édouard Lartet (Accession 1529 and 3546) and Dr. Léon Henri Martin (Accession 55712 and 163546). The branding, that is the identifying the creator of the replica or cast, is unexpectedly nonexistent on the commercialized replicas such as N255717 and N255719 from Dr. Krantz; whereas, the academic specimens that are supposedly untouched by the corrupting free-market, like N379367 and N379368 from Dr. Henri Martin, contain labels with the site and prehistorian’s name. The prehistorian associated with the artifacts seems to hold more weight in the process of commodification than the specimen’s extreme antiquity or even artistic value. Simply labeling the artifact with a famous name or location, despite the replica or artifact’s actual attributes, imbues it with agency and value (Bauer and Kosiba 2016: 118-120).

However, according to Steiner (2001), early international trade in art similarly dichotomized the notion of “art” and that of “commodity” (23). A similar “taboo” of commercialization in the trade of replicated or reconstructed materials is evidenced by notes on certain specimens that declare “reproduction interdite” or “reproduction prohibited” of the casts such as Dr. Léon Henri Martin’s La Quina H5 *in situ* cast (N279126). However, evidence found in the collections within the National Museum of Natural History indicates that reproductions of the replicas and casts occurred despite prehistorians’ interdictions as highlighted by the presence of duplicate casts within the museum’s collections.
The commercialization of artifacts and reproductions of the artifacts was of huge concern to French prehistorians, as commerce was often tied to the circulation of fraudulent specimens in their minds. Édouard Lartet warned the early United States National Museum that in their desperation to expand their collections that:

As many of the objects from these different localities have long been articles of commerce, I suppose it will be easy for your correspondents to procure them for you, only they should take care not to be imposed on by counterfeiting which has been exercised in a grand scale, whether in France or elsewhere... (Accession 3546).

He continues by offering to send an authentic specimen of his own along with a supposedly fraudulent specimen from the infamous site of Moulin Quignon, where excavation workers for one of the first French prehistorians, Boucher de Perthes, forged specimens due to financial incentives for discovering new artifacts (Accession 3546; Petraglia and Potts 2004: 58). Dr. Henri Martin similarly averted the potential for commercialization of his specimens early in his career by refusing to “indicate a price” in favor of exchange (Accession 55712). Despite attempts to remove archaeological specimens from economic circulation, their status as commodities possessing the agency to legitimize emerging museums as centers of research and education for the field of archaeology in the United States maintained their economic value in commercial markets.

Chapter 4: The Concepts of Replication, Forgery, and Authenticity in Archaeological Collections

Within the collections of thousands of prehistoric French objects entering the US during the “golden age of exchange,” replicas, casts, and even some artifacts labelled as “frauds” mingle with the archaeological specimens, which perhaps hints at the shifting
values of the replicas, casts, and “frauds” over time. The notions assigned to replications would in some cases have been received differently in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Dyson 2010: 572; Lowenthal 2015: 459). Especially within the fine arts community in the 19th century, replicas and casts provided a means for US students and experts to study classical styles of art that were prevalent throughout Europe (Dyson 2010; Lowenthal 2015: 448-463). Other fields like archaeology also disseminated knowledge of past cultures through this model of object-based study. The process of replication in particular was considered a means of understanding the material culture, as modern flint knapping experts claim today (Dyson 2010: 569; Inizan et al. 1999: 13-17).

Although the value of replicas and casts has shifted in the broader museum and academic context, modern prehistoric archaeological study and display still relies heavily upon these materials due to the scarcity and uniqueness of such artifacts in the archaeological record.

However, it is important to ask: what were the creators or distributors of the replicas and casts trying to replicate (Isaac 2011)? While reproduction in the form of cast-making elicits images of a more standardized process, the specimens still held display and research value for the institutions or individuals who believed in gaining knowledge through interaction with material culture (Dyson 2010). Even current exhibitions like the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of Natural History’s David H. Koch Hall of Human Origins uses casts and replicas to convey the expansive story of human evolution. Further, by creating replicas and casts of extremely rare or noteworthy specimens, prehistorians could send their discoveries around the academic world in material form without fear of damage, theft, or complete destruction to the original (Lowenthal 2015:...
455). Even so, small indications, which may be intentional or unintentional, of the replicas’ and casts’ true nature break through their façade of mimicry. Fingerprints imprinted in paint, as an example, on the replicas and casts remind both the modern and historical viewer of the object’s “inauthenticity” in a world where the process of replication represented a mastery over the original object and the history it encapsulated (Lowenthal 2015: 448-463).

Forgery, on the other hand, is the creation or replication of an object in order to mislead about the nature of the object’s authenticity, and examples of forgeries within the history of prehistoric archaeology abound (Vayson de Pradenne 1993). Although few identified examples of frauds are explicitly labelled as such in the National Museum of Natural History’s general Anthropology catalog (only 47 total when searching through the entire Anthropology collection’s database records), their presence hints at the perceived social and economic value of these collections that influenced both prehistorians and museum professionals when categorizing specimens. Although in many instances, little evidence for a specimen’s inauthenticity is provided. Within the French prehistoric collections specifically, the creation of fraudulent stone axes speaks to the commercial demand for specimens of this nature, and the eagerness of early museums to accept specimens supposedly associated with famous sites to bolster their reputation. In a sense, these materials could be viewed as recreations imitating the style and appearance of stone hand axes and other tools in a medium more deceptive than plaster or resin. One later collection, for example, contains specimens knapped by François Bordes that illustrate the knapping process (Accession 213032). However, due to the lack of evidence
indicating a specimen’s fraudulent nature, the classification of the fraudulent materials within the prehistoric French collections in the museum’s catalog should be examined.

As discussed in Benjamin’s (1936) influential work “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” our views of the authenticity of replicated or recreated materials speak to the shifting economies and societal structures during the 19th and early 20th centuries that feared that overproduction and oversaturation could damage the integrity of a once entirely unique object (Lowenthal 2015: 460). New dialogs have emerged questioning our notions of authenticity within this framework (Jones 2010; Holtorf 2013; Bauer and Kosiba 2016). The replicas and frauds, although technically inauthentic archaeologically, still speak to the “networks of relationships between people, places and things” during their time of creation and distribution (Jones 2010:189). The artifacts, whether replicated or authentic, can be viewed as microcosms of larger museum collections or assemblages which act as mediators of economic and academic supremacy between the United States and France (Latour 2005: 39; Bauer and Kosiba 2016: 120-121). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the complexity of authenticity especially residing in replicas, casts, and potential frauds, which are historical and artistic artifacts whose value has shifted considerably over time.

Chapter 5: Statistical Analysis of the National Museum of Natural History’s Replicas, Casts, and “Frauds”

The French prehistoric collections at the National Museum of Natural History highlight the early standard of attempting to create comprehensive collections from different temporalities. Through examination of museum documentation, a rough
estimate sets the number at approximately 2,500 catalog entries with some entries containing multiple specimens. According to Petraglia and Potts (2004), the number of Paleolithic French artifacts is 9,771; however, this figure includes items acquired outside the “golden age” of exchange (2004: 9). Included in the prehistoric collections are specimens from the Neolithic age, which has 97 catalog entries with numerous other possibly Neolithic artifacts that are not explicitly attributed to the Neolithic in the museum’s catalog. Further, the total number of replicas and casts within the collection including casts of modern human or archaic human specimens from the “golden age” exchange (approximately 1850-1940) is 146 items, which was calculated through both examination of the collection’s database records and physical inspection of the French collections in storage (see Appendix 1 for complete listings of categories examined).

The specimens’ accession dates range from 1869 to 1942, but most of the items date to before World War I. This could be an indication of replicas and casts gradually falling out of favor within the academic community; however, as mentioned previously, exhibitions like the Hall of Human Origins at the National Museum of Natural History continue to acquire and display replicas and casts (Dyson 2010). The most likely culprit for the decline is the implementation of stricter cultural patrimony laws by the French, which by 1913 had begun to regulate the movement of archaeological material out of France (Prott and O’Keefe 1988: 79-80; Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication 2016). The donors of replicas and casts in descending order of number of specimens include USNM Curator of Prehistoric Archaeology Thomas Wilson (60 items from accession 42207), French prehistorian Édouard Lartet (31 items from Accession 1529 and 1 item from accession 3546), and the Museum of St. Germain in Paris (20 items from
accession 18891), with other donors listed in *Appendix 1*. The replicas also derived from several French prehistoric archaeological sites and geographic regions, with the greatest representation in the southwestern French sites of La Madeleine in Dordogne (36 specimens), the Laugerie Basse and Laugerie Haute sites in Dordogne (24 specimens), and more generally the Dordogne region without specific site indication (17 specimens). Representation can be found throughout France, but the Dordogne region by far out-represents any other region in France.

In terms of types of objects replicated, the categories were established based on what the museum catalog designated as the object’s function. The most abundant category is within the “Other” category (32 specimens), which denotes mostly objects of an artistic, non-utilitarian, or indiscernible function. Many of the objects are carved or engraved and are often fragmentary in nature, but unlike the other categories explored for this work, the museum catalog does not explicitly designate the objects’ functions. Further analysis may yield better terminology to break up this “Other” category. The second highest category in representation are items deemed “Fragments” by the catalog (25 specimens), which are very similar to many of the specimens within the “Other” category. The third most prevalent type of objects are anatomical specimens, such as casts and replicas of archaic or modern human skulls and faunal remains (22 specimens). Additionally, there are other items including Shaft Straighteners (15 specimens), Axes (10 specimens), Harpoons (8 specimens), etc. (see *Appendix 1*).

Finally, the material composition of the original artifact from which the replicated items derived was noted with Bone being the most prevalent (55 specimens), followed by Horn (23 specimens), Stone (16 specimens), Antler (6 specimens), Ivory (3 specimens),
Ivory, Horn, or Bone (1 specimen), and Tooth (1 specimen). This category only contains specimens whose original material composition was designated, and the original composition of approximately 40 specimens is not provided by the museum’s catalog. It should be noted that most of the casts themselves are made of plaster, with one or two specimens fabricated from resin. Generally, most of the casts are painted some shade of brown, tan, or red. Another potentially noteworthy attribute of some of the casts is the presence of a raised “B.S.” or a seemingly mirrored “.S.B” on 7 of the specimens, which may be an indication of the identity of the cast maker or perhaps the production materials used to make the cast; however, attempts to research the “B.S.” mark returned no indication of its meaning.

In analyzing the replicas and casts within the prehistoric French collections, patterns of academic or institutional relationships, geographic focus, and type of object replicated emerge. While comprehensive collections for research and display may have been the ideal of the museum, certain donor’s preference, most likely from their own work or travels, is apparent. The heavy emphasis on the Dordogne region of France displays not only the unique specimens of the famous prehistoric region, but also the National Museum of Natural History’s ability to align itself with individuals or institutions collecting from sites in Dordogne. The objects also seem to reflect an over representation of pieces with some sort of artistic representation, particularly engravings of animals. These items may have been replicated due to their extreme rarity within the archaeological record, whereas other tools, especially stone hand axes, may have been replicated by recent stone knappers to display certain typological attributes.
The total number of “frauds” as labelled within the museum catalog within the prehistoric French collections is much lower than expected at 7 specimens total, and all of the supposedly fraudulent specimens are stone hand axes. These items were mostly donated by Dr. Elmer R. Reynolds (3 specimens), but representation is also present from Gaston L. Feuardent (2 specimens), and Thomas Wilson (2 specimens). The site or locality representation of the fraudulent hand axes was notable in that the majority of the hand axes were designated as being from St. Acheul (4 specimens) along with one axe from Abbeville and another from an unknown site. Additional analysis is needed to determine if the authentication of the hand axes is indeed correct, but The Reynolds Collection “Frauds” (A140351-A140354) case study will further examine the question of their authenticity.

Chapter 6: Case Studies

La Quina H5 in situ (N279126)

The La Quina H5 in situ cast (N279126), donated by prehistorian Dr. Léon Henri Martin himself in 1913 (Accession 55712), is an undoubtedly distinctive example of an anatomical hominid replica within the National Museum of Natural History’s collection (images in Appendix 2). Touted as Dr. Henri Martin’s “high point” of his excavations in the Charente region of western France at the La Quina site, which he purchased in 1905 and excavated intermittently for over 30 years, La Quina H5, now housed at the Musée de l’Homme, was discovered on the 18th of September 1911 and deemed a female Neanderthal of the Mousterian culture (Henri Martin 1911; Jelinek 2013: 2, 8).
According to Jelinek (2013) and others, the excavation and documentation of the La Quina H5 *in situ* points to potentially controversial archaeological practice. Jelinek recounts that once discovered, La Quina H5 was hastily removed and taken to the Henri Martin’s laboratory in Peyrat, Charente for further examination (2013: 10; Defleur 1993). In this haste, not only was no illustration or photograph taken of the specimen *in situ* at the La Quina site itself, but fragments of the skeleton were also forgotten until the next morning (2013: 10). Further, Henri Martin himself never provided illustration of the La Quina H5 specimen *in situ* at La Quina in any of his publications of the find, and photographs of the specimen were not taken until after it had been transported to his lab in Peyrat (2013: 10; Henri Martin 1911: pl. II and III). Henri Martin did provide a doctored photograph to Dr. Aleš Hrdlička of the Smithsonian’s United States National Museum with images of the bones superimposed over a later photograph of the excavation site (Jelinek 2013: 10; Hrdlička 1930: pl. 75). Jelinek points out the problematic nature of the context of the La Quina H5 specimen, citing the various attempts to reconstruct and analyze the individual’s cause of death and sexual attribution (Jelinek 2013: 9; Hrdlička 1930: 283-285; Defleur 1993: 93-94; Trinkaus 2016).

In a publication announcing the discovery of the La Quina H5 skeleton, Dr. Henri Martin himself stated, “Actuellement, n’osant pas mouler ces os fragiles, j’attendrai le résultat d’une maquette que nos excellents artistes, MM. Charles et Robert Bousquet, veulent bien exécuter” (translation: “Currently, I do not dare cast these fragile bones, I await the result of a model that our excellent artists, Messieurs Charles and Robert Bousquet, want to execute”) (Henri Martin 1911: 622). Much like the photograph of La Quina H5, the La Quina H5 *in situ* specimen could be a reconstruction of the site as
artistically rendered by Dr. Henri Martin and the Bousquets, unless Dr. Henri Martin changed his mind and cast the specimen. It is unclear if the specimen is a cast of the H5 specimen itself or a recreated scene, as the use of the term “moulage” designates the molding of a specimen to produce a cast; however, the ambiguous nature of La Quina H5’s excavation leads to questions as to whether the specimen was completely in situ when it left the site of La Quina (David and Desclaux 1992: 9; Jelinek 2013: 10). It appears that Dr. Martin and the Bousquets collaborated on other casts and modelling projects. For example, the “Buste de la Femme de la Quina,” a complete facial reconstruction, or “reconstitution,” meant to present a life-like image of the La Quina H5 skull was attributed to Charles Bousquet and Dr. Henri Martin and can currently be found at the Musée d’Archéologie Nationale (Musée d'Archéologie Nationale MAN83805). The reconstructions of La Quina H5 in situ, the “Buste de la Femme de la Quina,” and the numerous subsequent cranial reconstructions were both influenced by and depict prevailing notions of archaeological practice, display, and evolving conceptualizations of Neanderthals as ancestral human relatives (Jelinek 2013: 13; Trinkaus and Shipman 1993).

La Quina H5 in situ appears almost as if it were freshly excavated due to its realistically painted surface, in contrast to many of the other contextually isolated replicas and casts in the NMNH collections, including other examples of the La Quina H5 individual (other La Quina H5 specimens: N324720, N324780, N397367). On the surface are the imprinted names of the artists, “C.R. Bousquet” or Charles and Robert Bousquet, and the year, they created the replica, “1911.” The rough underside of the replica presents handwritten information by Dr. Henri Martin himself:
The writing on the back of this specimen evokes a less formal exchange that differs from other examples of casts from Dr. Henri Martin, which bear a brass label with Dr. Henri Martin’s name and a specimen number that may have been adopted later in Dr. Henri Martin’s career. However, Dr. Henri Martin maintains the rights of reproduction and distribution of his specimen, as he and many other French prehistorians were worried about the commercialization of their specimens (see: Lartet Accession 3546).

In examining the records associated with La Quina H5 in situ, the process by which the specimen was acquired attests to its importance to the comprehensive collection of the museum to further archaeological scholarship and exhibition as well as the importance of exchange, or academic partage, in the relationships between France and the United States. According to the accession file, Dr. Aleš Hrdlička, curator of Physical Anthropology at USNM from 1903-1943, sought a cast of the famous specimen and was willing to procure one at his own expense (Accession 57712; Petraglia and Potts 2004: 4). Dr. Henri Martin’s response, however, insisted instead on exchanging the cast for an “American Indian” anatomical specimen for his own collection. After some deliberation between Dr. Hrdlička and other museum officials, a compromise of three Pre-Columbian Peruvian skulls with “various forms of artificial deformation” would be exchanged for both the La Quina H5 in situ as well as a reconstructed version of the skull, which may have been furnished at a later date, as such a skull was not located
within the accession (Accession 57712). The three Pre-Columbian Peruvian skulls most likely came from Dr. Hrdlička’s 1910 expedition to South America, and while the specimens have been associated with Accession 52051, the particular specimens have not yet been definitively located in any French museums but may reside in a number of institutions with which Dr. Henri Martin was affiliated (Ales Hrdlicka Papers, National Anthropological Archives). This transaction reflects an exchange of “primitiveness” in that the French exchanged specimens of their temporal primitives, the Neanderthals, for specimens of American peoples deemed primitive by 19th and 20th century academics who used comparative frameworks to bolster developing evolutionary typologies.

Nichols (2014) discusses the exchange of native North American duplicate specimens within the Smithsonian Institution’s Anthropology collections and examines the contentiousness of such exchanges in that these exchanges have resulted in current issues surrounding the repatriation of indigenous material culture and human remains in the United States and abroad. Exchanges like that of Dr. Henri Martin and Aleš Hrdlička could be tied to similar exchanges like those explored by Nichols as these exchanges aimed to “build social and political capital” as well as grow an institution’s collection for research and display (Nichols 2014: 156). Indigenous groups in the United States and elsewhere find that their ancestors’ material culture and human remains have historically been circulated across the globe for both academic and commercial purposes (for example: Phippen 2016). While the exchange of indigenous American human remains in the form of three elongated Peruvian skulls may not directly be involved with the issue of repatriation or commercialization today, it does illustrate the academic, economic, and museum culture of the circulation of “primitiveness” during this era in history.
Despite its ambiguous origins, the replica of La Quina H5 in situ attests to Dr. Henri Martin’s early relationship with the United States and presents an example of the nature of exchange between the United States and France. As a unique example of a recreation or even possibly a cast amongst other examples of the La Quina H5 specimen, La Quina H5 in situ either recreates the moment of archaeological discovery as remembered by Dr. Henri Martin and his excavation team or provides one of the only facsimiles of the archaeological process and context of the specimen. Through an exchange of “primitiveness,” which today holds many controversial implications, the National Museum of Natural History continued its tradition of amassing a comprehensive collection in order to build their reputation as a center of archaeological research and display as well as establish a relationship with a renowned French prehistorian.

“The Swimming Reindeer” (A8146 and A99743) and The Mammoth Spear Throwers (A8148 and A136681)

Unsurprisingly, duplicate casts within the National Museum of Natural History’s prehistoric French collections most frequently occur within the two collections with the largest numbers of casts, the Édouard Lartet (Accessions 1529 and 3546) and Thomas Wilson (Accession 42207) collections. Two pairs of casts in particular, one depicting the top section of the “Swimming Reindeer” (A8146 and A99743) and another a Mammoth spear thrower (A8148 and A136681) both from the same excavation at the site of Montaotrue in Bruniquel, France, as well as their associated museum documentation provide a glimpse of how casts emerged into the prehistoric archaeological sphere and how they circulated (images in Appendix 2). Through the presence of these pairs of
duplicate casts, more specific questions of creation and dispersal over time arise (de l’Isle 1868).

Both original specimens were discovered in 1866 at the site of Montastruc in the commune of Bruniquel in the Tarn-et-Garonne region of southern France by Peccadeau de l’Isle (de l’Isle 1868). The finds were then exhibited at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1867 (de l’Isle 1868: 218). As highlighted by de l’Isle’s (1868) publication of his finds, the “Swimming Reindeer,” at the time considered two separate specimens, and the Mammoth spear thrower were cast by the Musée de Saint-Germain, or as it is known today, the Musée d'archéologie national (218). The specimens were then sold to the British Museum (Wilson and Upham 1896: 340). Eventually, l’Abbé Breuil discovered that the top section of the “Swimming Reindeer” was connected to another piece excavated by Peccadeau de l’Isle, so the two pieces have since been catalogued and displayed together (Cook 2010: 14). The specimens have been on permanent display and featured in exhibitions such as Ice Age Art: Arrival of the Modern Mind (Cook 2013).

The first set of casts from Montastruc was donated to the United States National Museum by Édouard Lartet in 1869 (Accession 1529). The first French prehistorian to contribute collections to the museum, Lartet became established as an authority in the field with his work at the Massat and Aurignac sites, which provided the basis for a chronology for human prehistory he established. Along with his English associate Henry Christy, Lartet also explored sites such as La Madeleine, Le Moustier, and Cro Magnon, where they took special interest in early forms of artistic representation, as highlighted in their work Reliquiae Aquitanicae (Groenen 1994: 451; Lartet and Christy 1875). The two casts (A8146 “Swimming Reindeer” and A8148 Mammoth spear thrower) were both
from the personal collections of Lartet himself (Accession 1529). With only very little
documentation about the collection available, it is unclear where the casts were acquired
for Lartet’s collection, but correspondence within the museum’s accession file for a later
collection donated by Lartet indicates that he acquired other casts from an artist at the
Jardin des Plantes in Paris (Accession 3546).

The second set of casts (A99743 and A136681) was loaned to the United States
National Museum in 1887 by Thomas Wilson, Consul to the United States in Nice,
France, who eventually became the museum’s Curator of Prehistoric Anthropology
(Petraglia and Potts 2004: 15; Accession 42207). According to museum documentation,
the two casts were collected sometime in April 1885. Wilson’s own inventories provide
an organization of his specimens by chronological period. It is unclear which items are
the casts, as Wilson’s original numbers are no longer legible in the case of the original
tag placed by Wilson on A99743 or surviving in the case of A136681, which does not
have a tag. However, based on Wilson’s inventories, the two specimens were most likely
organized into a mistranslated version of Lartet’s “age des l’ours de cavernes” that
Wilson called the “Cavern Period,” or what is roughly considered the Mousterian era
today, which Wilson notes was a collection of “principally plaster casts” (Accession
42207; Wilson and Upham 1896: 370; Lartet and Christy 1875). One entry in the list is
most likely A99743:

Peccadeau (Accession 42207)

An entry for A136681, however, was not immediately apparent within the inventory.
There are a number of possibilities as to where Wilson acquired these specimens. While
in France, he visited many collectors, dealers, and museums that may have furnished
these casts. According to his inventory, however, he writes that a “series of 13 moulages” were collected from antiquities dealer Eugène Boban of Paris. Another possibility is that Wilson or even Boban acquired the specimens from the Musée St. Germain, which was the first institution to cast the specimens according to Peccadeau de l’Isle’s publications announcing the specimens in 1868 (Accession 42207; d’Isle 1868: 218). Wilson mentions the institution throughout his correspondence as a destination during his travels in the spring of 1885, so the specimens may be casts created by the museum and obtained from the museum directly or through a third party (Accession 42207).

Although the specimens appear to depict the same original artifacts, the duplicates’ slight differences in appearance and documentation highlight the practices of replication, diffusion, and the eventual museum cataloging of the specimens. The Lartet casts (A8146 and A8148) and Wilson casts (A99743 and A136680) are distinctive in their appearance. The Lartet casts feature a sharper impression of original specimens painted in a dark brown hue allowing for contrast that emphasizes the finer details of the specimens. The Wilson casts are much less detailed and painted a much lighter cream tone with highlights of the specimens’ details provided in an ochre tint. Ultimately, these differences in appearance can be attributed to various causes. First, if both Lartet and Wilson acquired these casts from the documented location of the first casting of the original specimens, the Musée de Saint-Germain, it is possible that the mold used to produce the casts had simply aged to where the casts produced over time progressively lost the sharper detail seen in the earlier casts, like Lartet’s A8146 and A8148. Another possibility is that the Lartet casts were originally created by either the Musée Saint-Germain or some other institution like Lartet’s trusted artists at the Jardin des Plantes.
Over time, the casts of the “Swimming Reindeer” and the Mammoth spear thrower may have circulated throughout the collections of prehistorians like Lartet, perhaps being themselves replicated for sale by antiquities dealers like Boban or for exchange around France and eventually, as illustrated by the Wilson casts, to collectors and academics around the world.

Along with the discrepancies in appearance, the casts are also documented within the museum’s catalogs differently. However, as indicated by their locations in storage drawers, the duplicates found each other. Both Greene (2016) and Turner (2016) highlight the cataloguing and digitization process the museum utilizes can lead to numerous challenges when interpreting the history of the objects. Starting with the museum’s digital database reports, entries for the four specimens highlight the varying information provided with the specimens and then transferred. Within the database, records for A8148, Lartet’s Mammoth Spear thrower, for example, state that the specimen is both “Magdalenian” and “Neolithic,” while A136681, Wilson’s Mammoth Spear thrower, is not given a specific site name (A8148 Catalog Entry; A136681 Catalog Entry).

Further consultation with the museum’s physical catalog cards provides some clarification as to the digital database’s incongruities. The card for Lartet’s “Neolithic/Magdalenian” Mammoth Spear Thrower states that the Mammoth cast was once accompanied by a “Neolithic Scraper” for display purposes (A8148 Catalog Card). The catalog cards also clarify some associations between the casts that are missing from the database. The catalog card for Wilson’s “Swimming Reindeer” specimen (A99743) associates it with the bottom half of the poignard (A136680), which was not associated
with the top half by archaeologists until after the Wilson collection arrived at the United States National Museum (A99743 Catalog Card).

The duplicate specimens from the Lartet and Wilson collections allow for analysis of cast creation and circulation over time as well as the casts’ lives within the museum through their documentation and storage. Through understanding the artifact’s social lives both inside and outside of the museum context, a biography emerges of the artifacts as commodities that held value and agency as antiquities that would shape the reputation and legitimacy of the individuals involved in their excavation, casting, collecting, and eventual deposition into the museum (Kopytoff 1986).

*The Reynolds Collection “Frauds” (A140351-A140354)*

The Dr. Elmer R. Reynolds collection of “frauds” (Accession 21386, Catalog Numbers A140351, A140352, A140353, and A140354; images in Appendix 2), comprise the majority of the supposedly fraudulent specimens within the prehistoric French collections. Purchased by the museum in 1888 from local Washington D.C. archaeologist and patent office employee Dr. Elmer R. Reynolds, all four specimens are labeled as fraudulent stone hand axes from the famous site of St. Acheul. The catalog information for the accession is based on information provided by Dr. Reynolds himself in correspondence with the museum indicating that certain pieces in the collection had “no labels” or were “pseudo-antiquities” (Accession 21386). Within Reynolds’ memorandum to the USNM, the donor writes that more “definite facts” will be provided about the collection, but no further information from Dr. Reynolds could be located regarding this accession. Although it is unclear as to how Reynolds came to possess the artifacts,
Reynolds most likely received or purchased the artifacts with attributed temporal
designations of “Paleolithic” and “Neolithic” as well as the provenience information for
the collection from the original collectors of the accession, the Count de Maricourt, the
Baron de Maricourt, and Dr. Auguste Baudon of northern France (Accession 21386).

Generally, chipped stone axes, or hand-axes, have been informally described as
the “Swiss army knife” of Paleolithic peoples, as they were used for cutting, chopping,
scraping, mashing, piercing, etc. on a number of different mediums such as meat, bone,
stone axes are found throughout the Paleolithic (Leroi-Gourhan 2012: 136; 833-836).
Hand-axes appear in Europe with the Acheulean tool industry, named after the “type-
site” of St. Acheul on the Somme River in France (Leroi-Gourhan 2012: 6). The
Acheulean tool industry is perhaps one of the most expansive in terms of temporality,
lasting about 1.4 million years (Ambrose 2001: 1750-1752; Goren-Inbar and Sharon
2006). The Acheulean tool industry is occasionally referred to as relatively unchanged
over time (Roebroeks and Corbey 2009: 53). However, others maintain that regional
differentiation occurred during the Acheulean across Europe, and that the industry did not
proceed unchanged (Wynn and Tierson 1990).

After conducting a cursory analysis (i.e. checking for patina, blade sharpness,
etc.) of the specimens, I was not immediately convinced of the specimens’ inauthenticity.
Further, the catalog and associated records do not provide information as to how or why
the distinction of “fraud” was initially determined. When examining the question of the
archaeological authenticity of the Reynolds collection “frauds,” it is critical to
acknowledge the importance of the circumstances surrounding this initial classification.
As other works (Greene 2016) have explored the history of classification and the difficulties assigning cultural designations to the National Museum of Natural History’s Anthropology collections, I would argue that the prehistoric French collections occasionally suffered the same difficulties. While the documentation accompanying the collection only specifies that Dr. Reynolds himself believed certain objects within the collection to be “pseudo-antiquities,” further documentation or expert opinion is needed to support this distinction (Accession 21386).

The association of the tools with the famous site of St. Acheul would have served to increase their value, but it is entirely possible that Dr. Reynolds was not informed of specimens being knapped by modern flintknappers in the Acheulian style and that they would be present within this collection, which could be cataloged as “modern manufactures” similar to the later Bordes collection (Accession 213032). Another possibility is that one of the French prehistorians associated with the artifacts alerted Reynolds to the fraudulent specimens, and Reynolds was merely imparting the information to the museum staff. Though these possibilities are by no means verifiable due to the lack of documentation associated with the collection, it does call the classification of these and possibly other items within the prehistoric French collections into question.

While further examination by expert lithic analysts may provide a clearer indication as to the validity of the stone axes, deeper questions of classificatory cataloging practices and occasional ambiguities highlight the inherent challenges in the network of exchange between the United States and France in prehistoric archaeological
materials. Though the specimens undoubtedly could be fraudulent, the potential for other possibilities is too great to simply label them as “frauds.”

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Museum collections provide a glimpse into not only early museums as institutions and archaeology as a field, but also deeper insights into our modern, globalized world. The commodification, agency, and value of prehistoric French artifacts attests to the academic and commercial economy of such materials. Through this network of exchange of prehistoric French collections, particularly of replicas, casts, and “frauds,” these relationships between France and the United States shaped the nascent field of archaeology and helped legitimize emerging museums like the United States National Museum, or today’s National Museum of Natural History. By providing a statistical analysis of the frequency of replicas, casts, and “frauds” within the museum as well as in-depth case studies of certain specimens, the motivations and choices made about the collections are better situated within the broader network of exchange. Further, delving into the specific biographies of these objects reveals their social lives as derivative objects that on one hand encapsulate the history and materiality of another, “authentic” archaeological specimen yet on the other inhabit their own distinct existences emphasizing the complex and ambiguous processes that lead to their creation, distribution, interpretation, and significance over time.
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A8146 and A99743, A8146_A99743_ant-02-201704.jpg. Photograph of left side of the “Swimming Reindeer” specimens. Department of Anthropology, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.


A8148 and A136681, A8148_A136681_ant-02-201704.jpg. Photograph of left side of the Mammoth Spear thrower specimens. Department of Anthropology, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

A140351, A140352, A140353, and A140354, A140351_A140352_A140353_A140354_ant-01-201704.jpg. Photograph of front view of the Elmer R. Reynolds collection “frauds.” Department of Anthropology, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

A140351, A140352, A140353, and A140354, A140351_A140352_A140353_A140354_ant-02-201704.jpg. Photograph of back view of the Elmer R. Reynolds collection “frauds.” Department of Anthropology, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.


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Catalog card for A136681, Dept of Anthropology, NMNH, Smithsonian Institution.


University of Minnesota, Anthropology Department, Archaeology Collections Catalog. Minneapolis, MN.


Appendix 1: Statistical Analysis Tables

Replicas and Casts:

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<tbody>
<tr>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. F. Krantz</td>
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<td>Prof J H McGregor</td>
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Frauds:

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Appendix 2: Photographs of Case Study Specimens

La Quina H5 in situ (N279126):
Back view of La Quina H5 *in situ* from the Henri Martin collection (Accession 55712).
“The Swimming Reindeer” (A8146 and A99743):


The Mammoth Spear Throwers (A8148 and A136681):


The Reynolds Collection “Frauds” (A140351-A140354):

Front view of the Elmer R. Reynolds collection “frauds” (Accession 21386).

Back view of the Elmer R. Reynolds collection “frauds” (Accession 21386).