

JOHN LADD, 1923-1971

JOHN LADD'S DEATH, of a heart attack, on August 16, 1971, while on vacation in Yugoslavia, was a loss to his family, friends and colleagues, and to the American archaeological profession. Although John (or Jack, as he was best known) had come to archaeology and anthropology relatively late, having first served for several years as a Foreign Service Officer with the U.S. State Department, he had made a substantial contribution to Americanist studies by the time of his death. His "Archaeological investigations in the Parita and Santa Maria Zones of Panama" (see below), brought out in 1964, stands as a basic monograph in Panamanian ceramic typology and chronology; and his almost completed "Artifacts from the Sacred Cenote of Chichen Itza, Yucatan" will be, on publication, one of the classics on the famous E. H. Thompson collections from that Maya well.

Jack was a painstaking worker. He loved the research he was doing in and of itself and was little concerned with professional advancement or status. He was highly regarded by his colleagues, both generally and by those in the Peabody Museum at Harvard. At Harvard, he served both as Assistant Curator of Central American Archaeology and as a part-time Lecturer. In the latter capacity, he did some graduate student seminar instruction and, more regularly, taught in the Harvard Freshman Seminar Program. His area interests, as his principal works indicate, were in Mesoamerica and Lower Central America; but he also had broad theoretical interests, especially in the rise of urbanism, complex societies, and civilizations, both in Precolumbian America and in the Old World. He had carried out research along these lines for Educational Services, Inc., in the preparation of secondary school curricula, and his Harvard Freshman Seminars were devoted to this urban theme.

Jack was born in New York City on March 3, 1923. He attended the Cambridge School in Kendall Green, Massachusetts. During World War II he served with the U.S. Army with overseas duty in both Germany and Japan. Following the war he attended Swarthmore College, in Pennsylvania, and was graduated from there. He went on to study at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public Administration at Princeton and entered State Department service from there in 1951. But he gave up a Foreign Service career in February, 1955, to enter the Harvard graduate school in anthropology. His Ph.D. from Harvard dates to 1964.

Jack married Helen Pratt in 1947, and they had 4 children. Later they were divorced and he married Florence Cawthorne Shelton in 1969, by whom he had 1 son. All survive him.

I remember Jack as a man of even temper, a reliable field companion, and a man with a good sense of humor. He worked with me as a field assistant in British Honduras archaeology in 1956, and later he also did a field stint on our Altar de Sacrificios field project in the Peten, Guatemala. In 1956 he began, at my urging, a thesis project which involved the study of a vast collection of Panamanian pottery—the Parita and Santa Maria material which, eventually, he was to publish upon. For this undertaking Jack needed his good sense of humor and equable disposition for it was, in many ways, an archaeological nightmare. About 2 tons of pottery and a stack of cold notes—the results of 2 seasons work by M. W. Stirling and myself in 1948 and 1952—were turned over to him. It was enough to try the patience of Job, but Jack persevered to produce the study which established him as an authority in the Panamanian field. If Jack had been given the opportunity I have no doubt that he would have gone on, from this Panamanian work and from the Cenote study, in the course of sound archaeological scholarship that he had begun so successfully. He would also have continued his teaching and counseling of students, activities where his knowledge and his good will were ever apparent. But events worked out otherwise, and we have all been made poorer by his loss.

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Bibliography of John Ladd

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