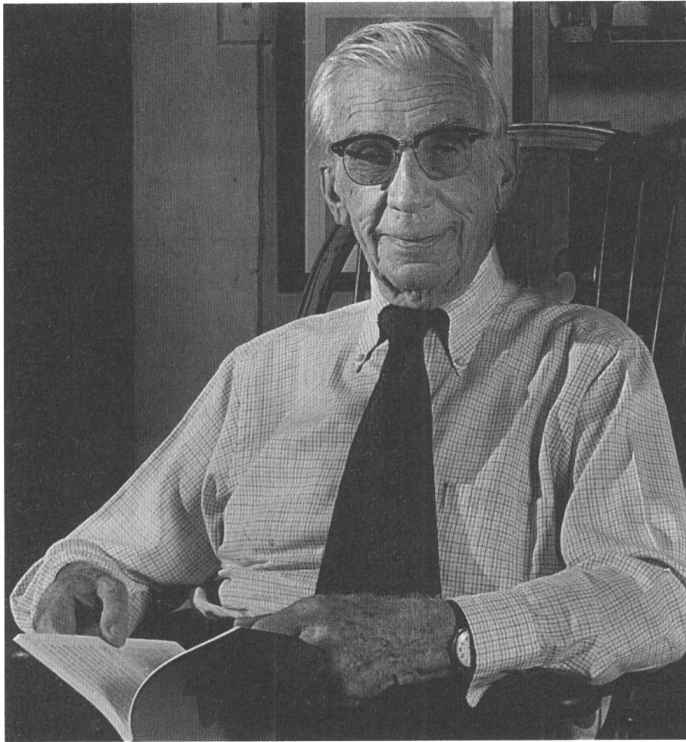


SAMUEL WATSON SMITH

1897–1993



Watson Smith, who died in Tucson, Arizona, July 29, 1993, was one of that fast-disappearing group of archaeologists who made significant contributions with little or no formal academic training in the field. He did not “find” archaeology until he was 36 years old, in southwestern Colorado, followed by work in the Kayenta area, at the Museum of Northern Arizona, Awatovi, and on through a long career of archaeological research and writing.

Born in Cincinnati on August 21, 1897, he was briefly exposed to archaeology as a child when he saw the Madisonville excavations of the Harvard’s Peabody Museum and when he took occasional trips to Fort Ancient for family picnics, but these experiences apparently awoke no dreams for a future career. He graduated from Brown University in 1919, after a brief interruption for service in World War I, and then held what he called several short and unglamorous jobs in industry. He decided to go to Harvard Law School, from which he graduated in 1924. He then entered a Providence law firm but in 1930 returned to Cincinnati to look after family affairs.

Smith has written, “I entertained a semi-romantic illusion of what an archaeologist was, with a trowel in one hand, a skull in the other, and a pipe in his mouth. . . I was more interested in the Past, in his-

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tory and geology, than in the Present, and hardly at all in the Future.” In 1933, meeting Paul S. Martin of the Field Museum of Natural History through mutual friends, he arranged to go with Martin to Lowry Ruin in Southwest Colorado. As a “laborer and a learner” he fell under the spell of archaeological fieldwork and the Southwest’s landscape and people.

After a winter at the University of California in Berkeley studying law, anthropology, and history under the sponsorship of Max Radin, dean of the law school (brother of the anthropologist Paul Radin), he decided irrevocably on an archaeological career. Joining Ansel Hall’s Rainbow Bridge-Monument Valley Expedition in the Kayenta area, he obtained further substantial archaeological experience and also met fellow diggers George Brainerd, Edward T. Hall, and John Rinaldo. In 1937 Ralph Beals asked him to come to the University of California, Los Angeles, and join him and Brainerd in writing up the Kayenta fieldwork. The resulting monograph, its publication delayed by World War II, was *Archaeological Studies in Northeastern Arizona, A Report on the Archaeological Work of the Rainbow Bridge-Monument Valley Expedition* (1945). It was a major contribution to southwestern archaeology, focused on the Kayenta area and including unusually detailed descriptions and illustrations of pottery types and also Brainerd’s innovative use of statistics in ceramic analysis.

In the fall of 1935 Smith was invited by Lyndon Hargrave to come to the Museum of Northern Arizona and take part with him and Harold S. Colton in the preparation of the *Handbook of Northern Arizona Pottery Types* (1937). Although not a joint author, Smith’s clear prose style and meticulous ceramic descriptions were undoubtedly of importance in making this volume a major reference work for archaeologists for many decades.

Smith was clearly achieving professional status by this time and was, although he was unaware, on the brink of the most important event of his career. J. O. Brew was organizing the Peabody Museum of Harvard’s excavation program at Awatovi, a major pre- and post-conquest Hopi village. He had met Smith in Colorado in 1933. When he again met him in Flagstaff, he invited him to join the Awatovi Expedition. Smith’s arrival in the summer of 1936 coincided with the finding of a kiva with extensive painted murals. Because no one else was available, Smith was asked to tackle the problem of exposing and recording these remarkable artistic and religious records. He has written, “That. . . beginning turned out to be one of the bonanzas of the whole expedition. In subsequent summers numerous painted kivas were discovered, some of them very, very elaborately painted, and since I had undertaken that phase of the operation, I continued it, devoting almost all my time for four years to it.”

His report on the murals, completed in 1949, was *Kiva Mural Decorations at Awatovi and Kawaikawa with a Survey of Other Wall Paintings in the Pueblo Southwest* (1952). This, like Smith’s other Awatovi monographs, was issued by Harvard’s Peabody Museum. It was a magnificent publication, intellectually and also physically, with its many fine illustrations and its extensive study of the implications of the murals’ iconography. The ethnologist Edward P. Dozier, in a review in the *American Anthropologist* in 1954 called it “a fine example of the contribution that archaeology can make toward the understanding of present-day pueblo art and religion.”

World War II interrupted Smith’s career with military service in the Southwest Pacific. On duty in New Zealand he met the botanist Lucy Cranwell, and in 1943 they were married. After the war they settled in Cambridge where their son, Benjamin, was born and where Smith continued work on his report on the kiva murals. He also served Peabody Museum in many other ways, including, with Philip Phillips, a major reordering of the museum’s vast and confused storage areas.

In 1948 the Smiths moved to Tucson, Arizona, where Watson decided to continue research and writing on the Awatovi materials, much of which still remained unstudied and unreported. The laboratory he set up in the guest house in back of his home became Peabody Museum West of the Pecos and functioned as an official “branch” of the Peabody Museum at Harvard until it closed in 1975. With the able collaboration of Robert Burgh, two major monographs were completed, *Painted Ceramics of the Western Mound at Awatovi* (1971) and *Prehistoric Kivas of Antelope Mesa, Northeastern Arizona* (1972). George Gumerman, in a review in *American Antiquity* in 1973, said of the former, “In spite of

the large amount of detailed description, Smith has not treated the pottery types and design styles solely as isolated segments of a spectrum, but has rather integrated the Awatovi ceramic types into a ceramic school which is more than the typical agglomeration of traditional types." He also complimented Smith's "extremely engaging and free flowing style" of writing. Smith had developed the idea of a "ceramic school" earlier in his "Schools, Pots, and Potters" (1962). His final work with Awatovi material was a collaboration with James C. Gifford, *Gray Corrugated Pottery from Awatovi and Other Jeddito Sites in Northeastern Arizona* (1978).

His interest in fieldwork continued unabated. In 1948 he had been asked by Harold S. Colton, director of the Museum of Northern Arizona, to direct a summer's work on small Sinagua or Pueblo II sites at Wupatki National Monument, near Flagstaff, which he not only did effectively but reported promptly in *Excavations in Big Hawk Valley* (1952). This was followed in 1949 and 1951 by directing the Peabody Museum's excavations in the Quemado area of west-central New Mexico, on the boundary of the Anasazi and Mogollon cultures.

Smith's versatility as a scholar cannot be better demonstrated than by the research he undertook in 1951, a study of Zuni law with the collaboration of John M. Roberts, for Harvard's Rimrock Project, or officially, the Comparative Study of Values in Five Cultures. With Zuni elders and an interpreter he compiled a unique corpus of Zuni law (1954). While Smith's career was facilitated by his independent means, his skill at identifying promising opportunities and following them up wholeheartedly and completely also played an important role.

A wholly unexpected research opportunity came in 1955 when he visited Los Angeles to lecture on the Awatovi murals, a subject on which he was in great demand. He was having dinner with Frederick Webb Hodge when Hodge suddenly asked him if he would write a report on Hawikuh, a contact period Zuni town where Hodge had excavated from 1917 to 1923 for the Museum of the American Indian—Heye Foundation. At 90, Hodge had realized he would never write the report himself. At first, reluctant, Smith agreed and asked Richard and Nathalie Woodbury to collaborate in the research and writing. The result, published in 1966, was one of the most long delayed monographs in archaeological history, but useful nevertheless.

Smith continued to write through the 1970s and 1980s, publishing numerous reviews, forewords, and scholarly articles and essays. His versatility is reflected in the many verses he wrote and sent to friends—doggerel he called them. He also wrote a substantial autobiographical volume, *One Man's Archaeology* (privately printed in 1984 and reprinted in shortened form in *Kiva* in 1992), a volume that is at the same time serious, informative, highly personal, philosophically reflective, and humorous. For many years Smith was a member of the Board of Directors of the Museum of Northern Arizona; he eventually wrote its history, published in 1969. In 1983 the American Anthropological Association awarded him the Alfred Vincent Kidder medal for eminence in American archaeology.

Throughout his career Smith saw archaeology as a combination of science and the humanities; he recognized that while archaeology was deeply involved with material things, ultimately it concerned itself with the people who created them. His career centered in the western Anasazi area (except for a season at Pylos in Greece with his lifelong friend, the archaeologist Carl W. Blegen). His research was meticulous, his writing clear and elegant, and his generosity to friends and collaborators more than we will ever fully know. He had a deep sense of responsibility, most conspicuous in his years of work on the Awatovi materials, work that no one else was willing or able to do. He wore his erudition lightly, and even the most demanding task was approached with contagious enthusiasm and zest. His archaeological contributions made a substantial and permanent addition to our knowledge and understanding of the Native Americans of the Colorado Plateau.

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(A complete bibliography of Watson Smith and a biographical chapter appear in *When Is a Kiva? and Other Questions about Southwestern Archaeology*, edited by R. H. Thompson, University of Arizona Press, 1990.)