



ALFRED MARSTEN TOZZER - 1877-1954

In the death of Professor Alfred Marsten Tozzer on October 5, 1954, the Peabody Museum and Harvard University suffered an irremediable loss. Although retired from teaching in the Department of Anthropology since 1949, Dr. Tozzer remained in close contact with all the activities of the Museum until a short time before his death. It may be said that Tozzer devoted his entire life as an anthropologist to the service of Harvard, but the Peabody Museum was the particular object of his affection. It is, of course, as teacher, that his enormous influence upon American archaeology and ethnology will be measured; and his own scholarly contributions will be longest remembered; nevertheless it seems appropriate to speak first about the Museum. He was inclined to be a little apologetic about his feelings in this regard, as though they were not quite rational. Certainly there is nothing about this antiquated pile of New England mill construction to inspire feelings of a rational nature. But to Tozzer the collections and the library constituted the Museum and he labored unceasingly to bring them up to the highest possible completeness in the areas of his interest. It was his belief that the resources of the Peabody Museum in Middle American archaeology and ethnology were unexcelled anywhere in the world, but it never occurred to him to mention his own share in bringing this about. In such matters he displayed an unshakable preference for anonymity.

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Dr. Tozzer's connection with the Peabody Museum began directly after his graduation from Harvard College in the class of 1900. He was awarded the Winthrop fellowship and made his first field trip that summer and fall with Roland B. Dixon, at that time Assistant in Anthropology, to study Indian languages in California. It is important to note that his initial orientation was toward linguistics and cultural anthropology. In the following summer and fall (1901) he worked in New Mexico, collecting linguistic and ethnological data on the Navahos in the vicinity of Pueblo Bonito. His success may be measured by the fact that he took part in the 9 days' ceremony of the Night Chant, and was permitted to make a copy of one of the sand paintings. A paper on this unique experience, given at the Thirteenth International Congress of Americanists at New York in 1902, is the first of Tozzer's published works.

In December of 1901 Tozzer was appointed as the first traveling fellow of the Archaeological Institute of America and departed immediately for Yucatan. He established himself in one of the native households at the Hacienda at Chichén Itzá, then owned by E. H. Thompson, amateur archaeologist and American Consul, and addressed himself to the task of learning Maya. During the 4 months spent in this manner he made several trips into the surrounding country, endeavoring to make contact with other less acculturated Maya groups. He also spent long hours at the ruins, making paper molds with Thompson, and learning to copy reliefs under the tutelage of Miss Adele Breton, the charming but certainly eccentric British artist, who was working at Chichén at this time. One might surmise from his enthusiastic letters, full of reference to the "wonderful ruins," that the linguist was already beginning to turn archaeologist. There was, however, another and perhaps more powerful force impelling him in that direction. Mr. Charles Pickering Bowditch, the great patron of the Peabody Museum, whose interest in the Maya hieroglyphic system had sustained a continuous program of archaeological investigation in the area since about 1888, was also a member of the Fellowship Committee of the Archaeological Institute. It was Mr. Bowditch's hope that the problem of the hieroglyphs might be solved through contact with some as yet undiscovered Maya-speaking group, in whom memories of their ancient civilization had not been totally

extinguished, and it was this quest that largely determined Tozzer's activities during the entire 4 years of his incumbency of the Institute fellowship. The first possibility entertained was that such groups might be found in the region east of Chichén, between there and Tulum, on the east coast of Yucatan. Unfortunately, in 1902 access to this country was barred by a native insurrection then in progress.

In the season of 1903 Tozzer was back again at Chichén with plans for the Tulum expedition, but the project was still hazardous and had to be abandoned. In the meantime a new possibility had offered in the Usumacinta River region to the south. Teobert Maler, German soldier of fortune and undefatigable Central American traveler, had brought back reports of idols and secret rites among the Lacandones of Lake Pethá, who were at that time, and still are, one of the least acculturated Maya-speaking groups in all Middle America. Here, perhaps, was the key that would unlock the mysteries of the ancient monuments. Tozzer accordingly left Chichén in midseason, proceeded to Frontera at the mouth of the Usumacinta, ascended the river by steamer to Santa Margarita above Tenosique, and traveled overland by horseback to Lake Pethá. Here he made contact with a small group of Lacandones, who allowed him to settle down in an unused hut. He was delighted to find that their dialect differed little from the Maya he had learned in Chichén. After a few weeks of carefully cultivated intimacy he was not only able to witness all of their ceremonies, but even took part in some of them himself. He was struck at once by the similarity to the rites described in Landa's *Relacion*. Upon leaving Lake Pethá he was given 2 of the crude pottery *incensarios* around which the rites were centered, so that he might remain in contact with his new religion. One is prompted to observe that, if Tozzer's interest later shifted toward archaeology, it was certainly not due to any lack of talent for ethnographic field work. His letters of this period show the most lively and unaffected interest in everything that transpired in this tiny settlement. They describe warm personal relationships with these remarkably uncultivated people in a style that is unmarred by the slightest trace of condescension.

Dr. Tozzer's field season of 1904 was divided as before between the Usumacinta and Chichén. In the former, he continued to work with the Lake Pethá Lacandones, but visited

other groups as well, in the course of which he made a general survey of the ruins of the Ocosingo district. His work in Yucatan consisted in investigating the more deeply buried ceremonial life in the light of what he had learned from the Lacandonnes. Comparison of the 2 cultures, closely related linguistically but differing so markedly in degree of acculturation, became the subject of his Ph.D. dissertation, completed in 1904, and subsequently published by the Archaeological Institute of America in 1907 under the title *A Comparative Study of the Maya and Lacandonnes*.

In the fall of 1904, Tozzer studied at Columbia under Boas and Bandelier and began to work up his linguistic material in preparation for his "Maya Grammar," which appeared in 1921. This was the beginning of a relationship that was to have especial value for Boas at the time of the first World War when, in his own words, "my loyalty to scientific truth was assailed on political grounds." No one who knew Tozzer even slightly will be surprised to hear that he staunchly defended Boas when few other American anthropologists had the courage to do so.

In his fourth and last trip as holder of the Institute fellowship in the season of 1905, Tozzer again went to southern Mexico, ascended the Usumacinta, Lacantun, and Tzendales rivers and visited the scattered Lacandon settlements along their banks. Thus he greatly extended his knowledge of the country and people, and also discovered the important and hitherto unreported Tzendales ruins, but he still failed to find any surviving knowledge of the hieroglyphic writing and the calendar. On his return journey he visited the Tzeltal, Chol, and Chintal groups for the purpose of collecting comparative linguistic material on these little-known Maya dialects.

Back in Cambridge in the fall of 1905, Tozzer offered for the first time his famous Maya seminar, Anthropology 9, which probably propelled more students into Maya archaeology than all other courses that have been given before or since. He was a gifted teacher, one who could dispense prodigious quantities of information at breakneck speed, in a stridency of enthusiasm, passing around masses of drawings, photographs, and specimens the while, and leaving his students at the end of the hour exhausted and more than a little bewildered, but glad to have been there. A minor accomplishment was his ability to put the most

surprising amount of bibliography and the whole Maya calendrical system as well, on a 2 by 4 wooden blackboard, in a minuscule but perfectly legible hand.

In the following spring Tozzer made a lecture tour for the Archaeological Institute relating his Central American experiences in 19 of the principal cities between Boston and Chicago. This was a great success and he was asked to do it again the following year, but was obliged to decline under the pressure of other duties. He did, however, make a similar tour later, in 1913. In the summer of 1905 he went to Europe and worked in the Archives of the Indies at Seville.

Next year (1906-7) Tozzer gave Anthropology 1 for the first time and for the next 40 years Harvard undergraduates were seldom without the opportunity of hearing an exciting account of what anthropology is and what anthropologists do. As one of a long *corvée* of assistants in that course, the writer knows from first hand how seriously he took it and how much of himself was poured into it year after year.

In the summer of 1907, Tozzer, along with Dixon, Kidder, and Morley, took part in a joint expedition of the Peabody Museum and the Archaeological Institute in the Rito de los Frijoles, New Mexico, under the direction of E. L. Hewitt. This collaboration with Hewitt marks the beginning of another cycle of Peabody Museum folklore. Tozzer's personal relationships were invariably characterized by an absolute and clear-cut integrity that resulted in the warmest kind of friendship or, less often, the exact reverse. This Southwestern expedition was, of course, straight archaeology and marks a turning point in Tozzer's career, and in 1909-10 we find him leading the Museum's Central American expedition which mapped the ruins of Tikal, Nakum, and the previously unreported site of Holmul. His assistant, R. E. Merwin, continued investigations at the latter site in the following season, and the results when published a good deal later by George Vaillant were basic to the stratigraphy of Maya archaeology. The summer of 1910 saw him again in Yucatan and in Mexico as representative of Harvard University at the inauguration of the University of Mexico, and the following summer (1911) he was in Mexico again with Clarence Hay making collections for the Museum. In the academic year between these 2 visits he offered his Mexico course, Anthropol-

ogy 10, for the first time. It was in this year that he received his first significant academic honor, Fellowship in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In the following year he began his course on primitive society, Anthropology 12, which resulted in the publication of his *Social Origins and Social Continuities* in 1925. In 1913 he was appointed Assistant Professor of Anthropology for 5 years and Curator of Middle American Archaeology and Ethnology in the Peabody Museum without term.

In April of this same year Tozzer married Margaret Castle of Honolulu and from this time on there were frequent trips to Hawaii which became for him a second area of anthropological interest, which was to prove of great usefulness in World War II when he served his country for the second time as Director of the Honolulu Office, Office of Strategic Services, from January, 1943, to July, 1945. His first military service was as Captain in the Air Service from October, 1917, to December, 1918, during which period he presided over Air Service Examining Boards, first in Denver and later in San Francisco. Upon discharge from active service he was commissioned Major in the Reserve Corps for 5 years and recommissioned in 1924 for a similar period.

Getting back to Tozzer's academic and professional history, in the year 1913-1914 he was given leave of absence from Harvard to take the rotating Directorship of the International School of Archaeology and Ethnology in Mexico for that year. Despite the unsettled political conditions in Mexico at this time — the Tozzers and Clarence Hay arrived in Vera Cruz just in time to obtain a too-intimate view of the shelling of the city by the U.S. Navy — it was a successful season, mostly devoted to excavations at the site of Santiago Ahuizotla near Mexico City, published as Bulletin 74 of the Bureau of American Ethnology in 1921. This was Tozzer's last field trip in Middle America, though he was to make several more journeys there, the last one in the fall of 1941, when the picture at the head of this article was taken. His last day in the Maya area was spent at Copan with A. V. Kidder and other members of the Carnegie Institution staff on December 7, 1941!

Upon Tozzer's return to Harvard after the first World War, academic honors and responsibilities accumulated at an accelerated pace. Within 3 years he was made Associate

Professor, full Professor, and Chairman of the Division of Anthropology. In 1922 he was appointed a member of the Academic Board of Radcliffe College and in 1932 became its Secretary and a member of the Trustees and of the Council of the College. He was chosen as Faculty Representative of the Harvard Alumni Association in 1927, and made a permanent member of the Administrative Board of Harvard College in 1928, an honor and responsibility which he valued very highly and discharged most faithfully until his retirement in 1948. Having taken up a job, of whatever sort, Tozzer had the rare faculty of being able to stay with it year after year without the slightest perceptible abatement of energy or enthusiasm.

In 1928 Tozzer was elected President of the American Anthropological Association, and was re-elected the following year for a second term. He served as A.A.A. representative on both the National Research Council and Social Science Research Council at various times. In 1942 he was elected to the National Academy of Sciences.

In October 1940 Tozzer was the recipient of an honor which pleased him more than he was ever quite willing to admit. A group of his former students, led by George Vaillant, organized a surprise party at the Tavern Club in Boston, at which he was presented with an advance copy of *The Maya and their Neighbors*. This thinly disguised *Festschrift* had been in preparation some 2 years under the code name "Smith Volume." It is hard to say who was the more surprised, the dedicatee, or the promoters of the scheme, who could hardly believe that Tozzer, with his extraordinarily sensitive antennae for picking up intelligence, had not got wind of it. There are those who still maintain that he knew all about it and that his acceptance was one of the finest jobs of acting that had ever been seen at the Tavern Club.

Notwithstanding the increase of academic and professional responsibilities in his later years, added to the full load of teaching, which he never shirked, Tozzer maintained a steady output of important research. It was characteristic of him to concentrate his efforts in major undertakings, hence the comparative brevity of his total bibliography. His annotated translation of *Landa's Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán*, in effect a compendium of all that was known of Maya ethnohistory at the time of writing, will remain the definitive text of this

fundamental source for many years to come. It was likened by one colleague to Eames' never-to-be-completed edition of Monsignor Pirelli's *Antiquities of Nepenthe*. This was perhaps intended to be a good-natured gibe, but was in some respects a sound comparison. Readers of *South Wind* will recognize in the "conscientious annotator" of Douglas' story the same unaffected simplicity and passion for the truth that animated Tozzer throughout his life. A certain blurring and blunting of personality is often attendant upon long-continued accumulation of knowledge and understanding; it is one of the occupational hazards of scholarship. This never happened to Tozzer. To borrow from Douglas again, he "kept his edges intact." This is perhaps only a roundabout way of paying tribute to his personal courage, which was outstanding. He invariably grasped the nettle; was never known to temporize or to back away from a difficult situation. He had a saying: "See a head, hit it." In small matters this meant no more than "Do it now." In larger concerns it meant simply that he was not afraid to commit himself at once and forever. His loyalty, both to friendships and enmities, has become traditional in the Peabody Museum.

At the time of his death, last October, Tozzer had virtually completed a work comparable in scope to his Landa, a massive synthesis of all existing information about the great site of Chichén Itzá. It is a source of great solace to his many bereaved friends to know that he was thus enabled to round off his life's work in Maya archaeology and ethnology at the place where he so happily began it more than 50 years ago.

PHILIP PHILLIPS

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