



**AUGUSTUS LEDYARD SMITH  
1901-1985**

Augustus Ledyard Smith, one of the last of the old Carnegie Institution “greats” of Maya archaeology, died suddenly of a heart attack on December 5, 1985, at the age of 84, in Needham, Massachusetts.

Ledyard Smith was a midwesterner, born in Milwaukee on October 18, 1901, the son of Mary Eliot and Franklin Taylor Smith. His was a family that was at home on the Eastern Seaboard as

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well as in Europe. Ledyard and his brother Bob (Robert Eliot Smith, also a Maya archaeologist, and now deceased) were educated at the La Villa School, near Lausanne, Switzerland, and later, back in New England, at St. Paul's School and Harvard. Ledyard graduated from Harvard in the class of 1925. For a short while he worked in the family business, in Milwaukee, but in 1927, through the influence of his friend and old Harvard club mate, Oliver Ricketson, Jr., he turned to Maya archaeology. As a member of the Carnegie Institution staff, he participated in their field programs during the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s. Most notably, he was at Uaxactun, first under Ricketson, and later as field director. These Uaxactun excavations, as is well known, marked a major turning point in Maya archaeological research. For the first time, large-scale architectural digging and clearing was combined with detailed ceramic analysis and both architecture and the pottery sequence were linked clearly into Initial Series dating. It was also at Uaxactun that Lowland Maya Preclassic or Formative levels first were disclosed. The Ricketsons brought out the first Uaxactun monograph (*Uaxactun, Group E—1926–1931*, O. G. Ricketson, Jr. and Edith B. Ricketson, Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1937); but the second one was by Ledyard (*Uaxactun, Guatemala: Excavations of 1931–1937*), and this detailed and handsome report, published in 1950, clearly established him as a Maya archaeologist, *par excellence*, a man without a peer in large-scale Maya architectural excavation.

After Uaxactun, Ledyard, under the leadership of the late A. V. Kidder, turned to survey and digging in the Guatemalan Highlands, and his monograph, with Kidder, on the Motagua drainage (Smith and Kidder 1943) is one product of this phase of his career. Following World War II, he again resumed explorations in the Highlands until, in 1950, he joined the large Carnegie staff at Mayapan, in Yucatan. He was involved with this research, the last archaeological undertaking of the Carnegie Institution Division of Archaeology, until 1958. At Mayapan, he teamed with the late Karl Ruppert to do the settlement map and survey of that major Postclassic site, the results of which were published in *Mayapan, Yucatan, Mexico* (H. E. D. Pollock, R. L. Roys, T. Proskouriakoff, and A. L. Smith, Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1962).

With the close of the Carnegie Institution's archaeological division in 1958, Ledyard Smith joined the staff of the Peabody Museum at Harvard as an assistant curator. One seldom makes close friends in one's later years—or so it seems. For me, Ledyard was one of the few exceptions. I had known about him, his name, and archaeological achievements, as far back as my graduate school days, but it was only after he joined us at the Peabody that we came to know each other well. He was 57 at that time, and I was 45. He was by far the more experienced and better known archaeologist of the two of us, a situation that could have led to strained relations after I became his boss; but Ledyard had absolutely nothing in his makeup that would allow for or foster such a condition. From the first he was open, direct, friendly. He had his own ideas and was never one to hesitate to give voice to them; but our disagreements, whenever we had them in the course of our work together, were always amiable ones. We became firm friends and remained such, both professionally and personally.

Ledyard and I dug Altar de Sacrificios and Seibal together, or I should say that he did most of the digging; I was the overall project director, but he was the field director. His careful excavation techniques and record keeping are revealed in his published reports on these sites, especially in his masterful cross-sectional drawings in the Seibal monograph. I was fortunate to have such a colleague.

Ledyard was always a great companion, whether in the jungles of Guatemala or in more civilized surroundings. I have never known anyone to maintain such a steady good humor. He buoyed up our spirits when we were trying to set up a bush camp after dark in a pouring tropical rain, just as he kept things on an even keel when we were negotiating a complicated hotel bill at Madrid's Ritz. In our field camps, which Ledyard always managed with great skill and even luxurious elan, we employed large crews of diggers—50 or so in a season, off-season mahogany cutters, fishermen, *milperos*. Such crews contained not a few rough-and-ready rogues, perhaps even scoundrels. Ledyard not only dealt with all of them with great fairness, but with a man-to-man openness that had within it no hint of distrust or suspicion. I was frequently surprised by what seemed to me a transformation in personalities that I had privately marked down as “rascally” when they dealt with Ledyard. He, on the other hand, took that goodness which he seemed to bring forth from them for granted. Perhaps this, then, is the most fitting summation of Ledyard Smith as a man. He evoked and brought

out the best in those that he knew and dealt with, and this, as we make the journey through life, is a most admirable quality.

Ledyard Smith will be remembered in many contexts. In a formal professional setting, we know that he was honored in 1968 by the government of Guatemala with the Order of the Quetzal, given in recognition of his services in the development of the culture history and heritage of that nation. Soon after, an impressive festschrift volume entitled *Monographs and Papers in Maya Archaeology* (W. R. Bullard, editor, Peabody Museum, Harvard University, 1970) was dedicated to Ledyard and his brother Robert. It contained writings by many of his colleagues and associates.

Less formally, but still within the purview of archaeology, Ledyard will be remembered with fondness by those many one-time graduate students, now full-fledged professionals, who worked with and learned from Ledyard in our digs at Altar de Sacrificios and Seibal. I think from him they learned that a gentleman behaves well under difficult conditions. And although, strictly speaking, not one of his students, I add myself to this group.

Finally, Ledyard Smith will be remembered by his family. One always thinks of him in the context of this family. He referred to them constantly; they regarded him with love and affection. He is survived by his son, Ledyard, Jr., and his daughter, Sandra—children of his first marriage to Sandra Falk; by his daughter, Camilla—the child of his second marriage to Katharine Moss Mellon; and by his devoted third wife, Elizabeth (Betty) Griggs Nichols. These, together with a host of grandchildren, step-grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and cousins, all hold Ledyard in cherished memory.

Gordon R. Willey

#### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF A. LEDYARD SMITH

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