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Alfred Marston Tozzer 1876-1954

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ALFRED MARSTON TOZZER

1876-1954

ALFRED TOZZER was a many-sided personality who combined outstanding scholarship, inspirational teaching, and unusual executive capacity with both broad interests and dedication to a specialized field, which he continued to develop for over half a century. This field may be succinctly described by the title of a book of essays dedicated to him in 1940: *The Maya and Their Neighbors*.

His interest in the Maya did not develop immediately after his graduation from Harvard in 1900. The following years found him traveling extensively in Europe as well as participating in linguistic, ethnological, and archeological field work in Arizona, California, and New Mexico. His teaching included such broad subjects as general anthropology, primitive religion, social origins and social continuities. His intellectual outlook was molded by his friendship with Franz Boas, Roland Dixon, F. W. Putnam, and Eduard Seler.

Tozzer first went to the Maya area in the winter of 1902 as Traveling Fellow of the Archaeological Institute of America. His goal was the study of linguistics, but he managed to reach Chichen Itza where he witnessed the dredging of the Cenote of Sacrifice under the direction of E. H. Thompson. This brought him in touch with the archeology and material culture of the

Maya, in later years his specialty, which terminated with a monumental monograph to be published posthumously.

During the next three winters Tozzer became the first ethnological student to work among the Maya, chiefly the Lacandonones and other tribes dwelling in the heavy jungles of the Usumacintla drainage in Chiapas and Campeche. These years provided material for his Ph.D. thesis, submitted in 1904, and for two major publications on comparative ethnology (1907) and Maya grammar (1921b). Anthropology 9, his famous course on the Maya, was first given in 1905.

From 1891 to 1917, the Peabody Museum of Harvard sent annual archeological expeditions to Mexico and Central America. The first of these had been directed by Owens, Saville, Gordon, Maudslay, and Maler. Tozzer had not been actively associated with this work but for several years had been absorbed in teaching at Harvard. After Maler's sudden resignation, however, Tozzer asked for leave of absence to become director of the 1910 expedition with R. E. Merwin as assistant. Two major publications followed, describing the ruins of Tikal and Nakum (1911, 1913). These are notable for use of comparative methods and the correlation of hieroglyphic inscriptions with architecture. Another prime contribution was the discovery of Holmul, where subsequently the first ceramic sequence in the Maya area was brought to light.

For the following three years Tozzer dedicated himself to teaching, with ever increasing prestige, for repute of his ability as a lecturer had spread by word of mouth through the undergraduate body. In the winter of 1914 he again asked for leave of absence to become Director of the International School of American Archaeology in Mexico, succeeding his friend, Professor Boas. In taking this post, Tozzer associated himself at the outset with what has become one of the most important and finely calibrated archeological chronologies in the New World—one, furthermore, which has served as a pattern for subsequent research in other areas. He was unfortunate in that his work was interrupted by political events, but his publication (1921a) is one of the recognized steps in the advancement of knowledge.

Intellectually this journey to Mexico marked a turn in Tozzer's scientific and domestic life. He had a short time before married Miss Margaret Castle. They built a house in Cambridge and bought a beautiful place in New Hampshire. His abilities as an executive had become recognized and made increasing demands on his time: in the museum, the department, and the university. He never headed a field trip again. But the Mexican experience had added a contact with their neighbors to his knowledge of the Mayas. At this point he had reached full intellectual maturity. Graduate students from all parts of the country flocked to his courses. His two major publications were still to come, however, though slowly.

After two years during World War I as Captain, Air Services, Tozzer returned to Cambridge and became Chairman of the Division of Anthropology. The following twenty years may be described as routine, occupied by teaching and executive posts including, to mention a few, the Academic Board at

Radcliffe, Director of the Harvard Alumni Association, National Research Council, Social Science Research Council, President of the American Anthropological Association, Faculty Member and Librarian of the Peabody Museum, and Member of the important Administrative Board of Harvard. In addition to his many preoccupations, Tozzer yearly turned out technical papers reflecting his continued interest in and study of the Maya and Mexican fields. His spare time over the years also was devoted to the development of one of his greatest works, the translation and annotation of Diego de Landa's account of the Maya.

Landa had been Bishop of Yucatan and wrote his book in 1566. He was a dedicated extirpator of idolatry who had been removed from his post because of the mortality and suffering caused by his cruel zeal. His defense was made in a manuscript revealing in detail the pagan life of the Maya, a document of anthropological importance in the New World approached only by Pomo de Ayala and Sahagún, neither of whose works are yet available in English. It is an ironic fact that Landa, who burned most of the Maya books, also left the key by which the Maya writing can in part be deciphered today.

The Landa manuscript, which we once have held in our hands, is not voluminous but it is all meat. Tozzer's *Landa* is far more than a translation, for his over eleven hundred long comments dwarf the original text in bulk, and his critical cross-indexing makes readily available all eye-witness accounts of the sixteenth-century Maya. This is a work which can never be outwritten unless new documentary sources are found in the future. As a scholarly *tour de force* in analyzing an historical document, we can compare it with the *Marco Polo* edited by Sir Henry Yule and his successors.

World War II again took Tozzer away from his work at Harvard. For a year and a half he was director of the Honolulu office of the O.S.S. His objectives were to analyze intercepted Japanese radio messages, to develop bombing targets, and to prepare preinvasion pictures of the areas to be attacked by our forces. Apart from the military value of his work, parts of his reports deserve publication as anthropological literature, especially his study of Okinawa. Tozzer returned to his work at Harvard in 1945 and became Professor Emeritus in July, 1948.

In his youth Tozzer had been present at the dredging of the Cenote of Sacrifice at Chichen Itza. When later the objects recovered were given to the Peabody Museum, Tozzer was the curator in charge and he began to plan their publication. This he did both by having photographs and drawings prepared and, over the years, by building up invaluable files containing all references to Chichen Itza as well as comparative material to aid in the study of the collection. As a result the present writer, who published the section on metals, found his task half finished before he even began. Subsequent sections are planned on jades, textiles, pottery, wood carving, copal, rubber, etc.

Tozzer at first planned for himself only a modest introductory volume with a history of Chichen Itza and a description of the dredging. As publication was delayed and time passed, his material increased in bulk. His edition

of *Landa*, a tremendous work in itself, actually is only a by-product. His introduction to the Chichen Itza collection, finished a few months before his death, consists of over 1,500 typed pages of text accompanied by some 500 illustrations. It covers every aspect of Chichen Itza: its history, religious cults, arts, and industries as well as contacts with other regions. It concentrates in a single volume the learning acquired in half a century.

Tozzer will be remembered as a great teacher, both in and out of the classroom. His clarity of thought and of voice made it easy to follow him and to take intelligent notes. He combined an inspiring interest in his subject with a personal interest in the individual, starting at the lowest undergraduate level. He made it his business to see that his graduate students were properly housed and fed. No one will ever know how many he helped financially, either through arranging for scholarships or from his own pocket. At the same time, he was ruthless in putting on pressure to make you turn out your best.

So far as we know, Tozzer never directly suggested to anyone that he should become an anthropologist or specialize in Tozzer's particular field. He had some innate quality that made one want to study under him which is hard to express in words. When *The Maya and Their Neighbors* was written in his honor in 1940, all professional anthropologists in this country considered capable of doing so were asked to contribute, whether or not they had worked under Tozzer. The list of authors shows that eight out of ten had taken his Mexican and Mayan courses and, as a result of his teaching, two-thirds of the total had become specialists in these fields. His scholarship and influence thus pass far beyond his classrooms.

Alfred Tozzer was a man of passionate loyalties. He did not feel that his relationship with a student ever terminated, a feeling which was mutual. If one examines those works with a formal preface published on the Maya in this country during his lifetime, in most of them one will find acknowledged thanks to Tozzer for suggestions and help. Taken individually or together, they are a tribute to a man his contemporaries regard as great.

S. K. LOTHROP, *Harvard University*

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