

I. Editorial

There have been a number of questions concerning the e-mail addresses for the editorial offices of the BHA. Here are the addresses once again: documents@brick.net (short transmissions); docres@brick.net (longer contributions).

Douglas R. Givens, Editor

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II. Discourse on the History of Archaeology

The Allison V. Armour/William Henry Holmes 1895 Expedition to Mexico

by

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The foundation of the Field Museum's reputation as a place where serious science is practiced was laid by Allison V. Armour and William Henry Holmes in 1895, a little more than a year after the Museum was established. Looking back after a career of almost 60 years as an anthropologist, and having twice been honored as the outstanding practitioner in the field, Holmes described the trip to Mexico (the only expedition he led during his brief tenure as the Museum's first Curator of Anthropology) as "one of the most gratifying and important events of my life." It was also one of the most important events in the history of anthropology at the Museum.

The expedition was the brainchild of Allison V. Armour, who conceived the idea of an expedition that would carry out research for several departments of the Museum — anthropology, botany, geology and zoology. Armour (no relation to Philip D. Armour, the founder of the meatpacking empire) was a wealthy socialite, yachtsman and manabout-town with an interest in the natural sciences. In the event, Holmes and Charles Millspaugh, Curator of Botany, were the two Field Museum scientists who made the trip with Armour (Millspaugh was forced to abandon the expedition in its early stages because of an injury suffered in an accident).

Headquarters for the expedition was Armour's auxiliary steam sailing yacht, the *Ituna*, which departed from New York in mid-December 1894. Holmes joined the party in Jacksonville, Florida, and by year-end the yacht was anchored off Progreso on the Yucatan peninsula. During the next two-and-half months, Holmes and Armour conducted an extraordinary series of explorations, visiting the remains of ancient Mesoamerican civilizations that are legendary in the field of anthropology.

The party spent the first two weeks exploring the islands — Mujeres, Cancun and Cozumel -to the east of the Yucatan peninsula. There followed a month-long visit to the interior during which the party, guided and assisted by E. H. Thompson, explored Uxmal, Izamal and Chichen-Itza, using the city of Merida as a base of operations. The highlight of this phase of the trip was the five-day

visit to the ruins of Chichen-Itza, located on the hacienda owned by Thompson, who had purchased it with funds supplied by Armour. Thompson was himself an archaeologist who from time to time carried out projects for the Museum, although never an official member of its staff. It was at this site that Holmes was able to do his most important scientific work.

After returning to Merida and then Progreso, where the Ituna was moored, the party, including Thompson, sailed to Ciudad de Carmen, a journey of some 300 miles. From there the group journeyed 60 miles to the south to examine the ruins at Palenque for four days. There followed, after the return to the Ituna at Carmen, a voyage westward for several days to Vera Cruz, from which the group traveled to Oaxaca, visiting the ruins at Mitla and Monte Alban. A trip to the north was then taken to visit Mexico City, after which an excursion was made to San Juan Teotihuacan. The party then returned to Vera Cruz, sailed back to Progreso and then on to New Orleans. Holmes left the yacht there and returned to Chicago by train, arriving in mid-March.

Holmes and Armour were thus able to visit, in the short space of two-and-one-half months, some of the most important Maya, Zapotec and Mixtec civilizations studied today. The two were evidently men of extraordinary stamina and determination. The expedition could not have been comfortable and, to judge from the notes and letters of Holmes, considerable hardship and some risk were endured. The trip from Carmen to Vera Cruz, normally a one-day voyage, took more than three days, during which the Ituna encountered a “norther” which tossed the ship about in heavy seas. An earlier 100 mile round trip between Merida and Uxmal was made in a “Volan”—a box bed with two wheels drawn by mules—which Holmes ruefully observed was “equal to ten ‘northers’ tied in knots.”

Holmes carried his camera, sketchbook and notebook, and made frequent use of all of them. As his subsequent career was to amply demonstrate (he published more than 180 papers, although never free from museum curatorial and administrative duties), Holmes was a scientist who took care to document his observations and conclusions. The Mexico expedition is a prominent example of this trait. Holmes’s monograph was published in *Fieldiana* the Museum’s scholarly publication series. Armour underwrote part of the cost of publication. The paper was in two parts, totaling more than 300 pages, published in 1896 and 1897, entitled “Archaeological Studies Among the Ancient Cities of Mexico,” with 120 illustrations, some of them photographs and many of them drawings (Holmes was an accomplished artist who began his career as a scientific illustrator before becoming, first, a geologist and then an anthropologist). By the time the second part of the paper appeared, Holmes had departed for Washington to become head curator of the Department of Anthropology at the United States Museum (the Smithsonian).

“Archaeological Studies” is remarkable for the breadth and depth of its coverage and analysis, particularly given the relatively brief time the schedule allowed for the visits to the many sites. The visit to Uxmal was limited to one day (Holmes noted that the area was “fever-stricken”) yet Holmes produced from his observations 15 pages of text and several illustrations, including the splendid panoramic view shown here. The description of each major site is accompanied by a similar panorama. Creating these presented a challenge because the ruins had been abandoned for centuries and had become overgrown with and surrounded by foliage and vegetation. Each site was also carefully mapped by Holmes (“the compass and tape-line were constantly in use”) and the maps included in the paper are correlated with the panoramas.

Holmes did not neglect the examination of the individual buildings and the many inscribed monuments, although of necessity such work had to be superficial even under the then-prevailing standards of the discipline. He recognized and called attention to the fact that the achievements of the inhabitants of the ruined and abandoned cities reached their greatest heights in architecture and sculpture, and his detailed and precise descriptions of these are a prominent feature of the paper. Holmes's observations on the functions of the various structures has for the most part been in accord with modern theory.

Holmes was characteristically modest in his assessment of "Archaeological Studies": "The present paper does not assume to be more than a sketch of limited portions of a great subject [which describes] the sites visited as seen at a passing glance." Peer publications and the popular press were enthusiastic. A review in *The American Naturalist* called the paper "a valuable and characteristically clear summary of the important architectural features of the . . . ruins" and praised the "novel panoramic views of Uxmal and Chichen Itza" W J McGee, head of the Bureau of American Ethnology, writing in *American Anthropologist*, noted (not without a touch of condescension) that "the excellence of the scientific work in this new center [i.e. Chicago]... is found in the recent monograph on the Monuments of Yucatan." *The New York Times* carried a 2,500 word story on Sunday, March 1, 1896, describing the first part of the paper as "a valuable monograph"; the headlines read "Mysteries of Yucatan; Impressive Relics of a Race of Master Builders; Enigmas That Await Solution; Remnants of the Race Survive, but They Remember Nothing About the Former Glory." The story was accompanied by several photographs and drawings taken from the paper.

"Archaeological Studies" was of immense value to scholars in Mesoamerican anthropology, then in its infancy. It provided a virtual roadmap for the many professionals who later flocked to Mexico to examine these ancient civilizations. The paper remains useful to scholars of today; more than one hundred years after its publication, "Archaeological Studies" is still cited in the anthropological literature.

Unfortunately for the Museum, Armour moved to New York near the end of the century. He sponsored one other Field Museum expedition, in the winter of 1898-1899, led by Mills Spaulgh to collect plant specimens in the Antilles. In his later years he sponsored scientific expeditions both for plant research and for archaeology, most notably an excavation in Tripoli that discovered the famous "Venus of Cyrene," but not under the auspices of the Field Museum. His 1941 *New York Times* obituary notes that he was born in Chicago but does not mention the Field Museum.

An even greater setback for the Museum was Holmes' decision in 1897 to return to Washington. His position at the Field Museum was quickly filled by the Assistant Curator, George Dorsey. Dorsey was a relentless collector whose acquisitive tendencies and scientific interests led him and his assistants to many parts of the world. As it happened, Mesoamerica was not one of those parts. One reason for this, undoubtedly, was the Mexican law forbidding the exportation of antiquities. Not until the mid-1920s did the Field Museum have a curator working in Mesoamerica. This was J. Eric S. Thompson, who served as assistant curator from 1926 until 1935 and as a research associate thereafter until his death in 1975, at which time (Sir Eric by then) he was regarded as one of the world's leading scholars of Mesoamerican archaeology.

The Armour/Holmes expedition of 1895 gave a tremendous lift to the Field Museum as a serious scientific institution. Having acquired and arranged to display the more than 50,000 anthropological

objects exhibited at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, the Museum could have concentrated its efforts on acquiring more objects. And the Museum did continue to acquire objects, particularly during the Dorsey years. From the time of its creation, however, the Museum was conscious of its mission to provide a platform for scientific work. Its first expedition exemplified that impulse.

Acknowledgement

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III. Bibliographic/Archival Material Relating to the History of Archaeology

A. Works by Our Readership

Hawley, Marlin F.

2000 "Further Excavations of a Life: Floyd Schultz Revisited,"
The Kansas Anthropologist, 21:35-46.

B. Doctoral Dissertations/Masters Theses

Thomas, Jeffrey

1999 "Promoting the Southwest: Edgar Lee Hewett, Anthropology
Archaeology and the Santa Fe Style," Texas Tech, Unpublished.

C. Works Suggested by Our Readers

Alexander, John

1999 "Remembrance: Sir Laurence Kirwan," *African Archaeological
Review*, 16(3):197-198. - Peter Robertshaw.

Caves, Monuments and Texts: Zimbabwean Archaeology Today

1997 edited by Gilbert Pwiti, Studies African Archaeology 14, Department
of Anthropology and Ancient History, Uppsala University. - Peter
Robertshaw.

Ditswa Mmung: The Archaeology of Botswana

1998 edited by P. Lane, A. Reid, and A. Segobye, Pula Press,
Gaborone, Botswana. - Peter Robertshaw.

Cohen, Alan

1999 "Mary Elizabeth Barber, the Bowkers and South African Prehistory,"
South African Archaeological Bulletin, 54:120-127. - Peter Robertshaw.