

tered around a civic-religious center at the early northern lowland Maya community of Komchen. They cautiously propose that the trend to extended families organized into larger communities such as Komchen may have dampened social conflict over limited arable land in this agriculturally marginal area. Cliff, also dealing with the era of emergent Maya elitism, observes sustained nuclear-family dwellings at the densely occupied site of Cerros. Instead of a trend toward extended family organization, his single-family dwellings evince increasing disparities in elaboration and wealth—culminating in a sudden and dramatic reorganization of the entire community.

At the other end of the Maya temporal spectrum, Rice discusses the profound changes in community organization in the Peten region accompanying and following the ninth-century collapse of civilization there. His conclusion that the collapse of central governments dramatically affected the organization of households and communities belies the often proposed notion that Classic-period Maya elites had little practical—socioeconomic—connection with their commoners. The relationship of the elite to the commoners is a theme in Ashmore's discussion of the Maya site of Quirigua. There she suggests that elite households might have been spatially embedded in the commoner community, or at least arranged to facilitate the integration of commoners into the community. Finally, Drennen reviews general information concerning the compact or dispersed arrangement of households in communities from throughout Mesoamerica and from many time periods. One intriguing conclusion of his effort is that the known dispersed quality of Maya households in large communities may register intensive agriculture by their occupants in nearby plots. The embedding of farming families in their fields implies a significant degree of economic autonomy from the central authorities—another controversial theme in household archeology.

The book has an introduction by the editors providing a useful guide to the contents and issues, but it has no conclusion. This is unfortunate in a way, for there are some conclusions to be drawn concerning the value of household archeology. Despite the great difficulties facing the analysis and interpretation of households, the resolution of really fundamental issues in the study of ancient civilization lies in this empirical arena. Large-scale, hierarchical society survives through the constant renegotiation of relationships between those who provide power, the commoners, and those who wield it as elite. The language of such negotiation, the culture of a civilization, derives from

both sides; and so too do the success and failure of complex societies. It is noteworthy that the ancient glyphic Maya texts left by the Pre-Columbian elite focus significantly upon matters of family, descent, and marriage alliance—royal household organizations. Perhaps this is a coincidence, but more likely it is a matter of the shared experience of kin and homelife linking the exalted and the ordinary people and providing a basis for dialogue—a dialogue to which the modern study of past households must contribute.

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A Pair of Mayanists

A Dream of Maya. Augustus and Alice Le Plongeon in Nineteenth-Century Yucatan. LAWRENCE GUSTAVE DESMOND and PHYLLIS MAUCH MESSENGER. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1988. xxii, 147 pp., illus. Paper, \$19.95.

There are many aspects to the proper study of archeology, not the least of which is the intellectual history of the discipline itself. The archeology of the Americas provides a case in point, for the present-day configuration of the field is emphatically the

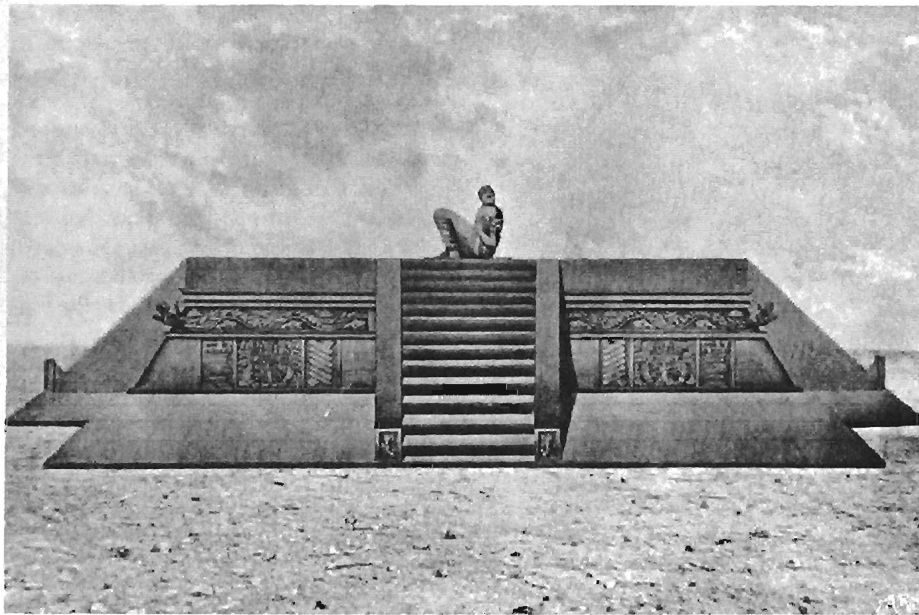
culmination of centuries of exploration, documentation, and varied intellectual approaches to the interpretation of ancient things. However, with some noteworthy exceptions in the work of Wauchope (1962), Willey and Sabloff (1974), and a few others, this area has remained relatively neglected as a focus of study. For that reason alone, I was pleased to hear about the publication of the present volume. Now, having read it, I am even more enthusiastic.

A Dream of Maya fills what was a conspicuous gap in our knowledge of the history of Maya research by dealing with the lives and works of Augustus Le Plongeon (1826–1908) and Alice Dixon Le Plongeon (1853–1910), surely two of the most interesting personalities in the long and tangled saga. Most important, Desmond and Messenger give us a glimpse of two worlds that we do not often see—Yucatan in the final quarter of the last century, and the intellectual politics and intrigues of that era as they played out in Merida, Mexico City, and the northeastern heartland of the American archeological establishment.

The volume contains all the essentials of the background of both Le Plongeon, including the work of Augustus in both surveying and mapping (which I did not know about) and his long history in photography. The core of the work deals with the Le Plongeon in Yucatan between 1873 and 1884 and their exploratory work and photo-



Alice and Augustus Le Plongeon in the Governor's Palace at Uxmal, about 1874. "They set up housekeeping in the central rooms, with hammock and mosquito netting hung in the inner room and dishes, including wine goblets, in the foreground. Field equipment—guns, butterfly net, surveyor's instrument, tripod and tape measure, and helmets—stand ready. The view camera sits . . . amid a pile of books on the table. Augustus writes field notes, with Trinity their dog napping at his feet." Alice "wrote extensive descriptions of life in the Governor's Palace in a series of 1881 articles" for *The New York World*. [From *A Dream of Maya*; Manly P. Hall Collection, Philosophical Research Society, Los Angeles, CA]



Augustus Le Plongeon's restoration drawing of the Platform of Venus, with chacmool, at Chichen Itza. Le Plongeon's restoration "included a detailed record of the existing decorative panels along with speculation based on their excavations. The drawing was photographed by Le Plongeon who added the foreground and cloudy sky from other photographs." The composite photograph was published in Le Plongeon's *The Origins of the Egyptians* in 1913. [From *A Dream of Maya*]

able many hitherto unknown photographic images of the northern Yucatan Peninsula, its people and important archeological remains—these for a time from which photographs are all too rare. Desmond and Messenger deserve our collective gratitude for bringing these images out of obscurity.

Second, the work provides us with useful insights into one of the prominent issues of the present day, namely the competition in the public media between the findings of "establishment" or "mainstream" archeology and the roster of pseudoscientific "discoveries"—the alleged power of pyramids, the dangers of the "Bermuda Triangle," and so on—that weekly proclaim themselves from the sensationalist tabloids. Thus, this welcome work by Desmond and Messenger should become a key source for those of us concerned with the public perception of archeology and archeologists.

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Northern Connections

Crossroads of Continents. Cultures of Siberia and Alaska. WILLIAM W. FITZHUGH and ARON CROWELL. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, DC, 1988. 360 pp., illus. \$45; paper, \$24.95.

The exhibition catalogue is an imperfect genre. Like the exhibition it accompanies, it is invariably the product, more than other forms of scholarship, of a severe deadline, uncertain funding, and endless compromise. Not infrequently, important decisions on form and content are controlled by someone other than the author or editor. Perhaps this is why it is always so easy to fault the product; to do justice to catalogue or exhibit, one might argue, neither should be treated in isolation from the other.

Crossroads of Continents was published in the fall of 1988, at the same time as the exhibit of the same name—"Crossroads" herein—opened at the Smithsonian Institution's Museum of Natural History. The exhibit, whose aim was to show the indigenous people living on either side of the Bering Strait as "components of a pan-North Pacific 'oecumene'" and to show how they have been related, through time, by the exchange of cultural products and culture itself, opened to considerable acclaim. That it happened at all is a feat for which William Fitzhugh should receive lasting credit.

"Crossroads" brings together, for the first time, ethnographic artifacts from Alaska and Siberia found today in American and Soviet

graphic documentation of the archeological sites of Uxmal and Chichen Itza—as well as visits to other archeological zones. The timing of their stay in the peninsula could not have been worse for the pair, given the dangers attending the ongoing "caste wars" that disrupted the northern Maya zone well into the present century. Augustus Le Plongeon's excavations at Chichen Itza were among the first to take place in the Maya Lowlands; his meticulous cross section of the Venus Platform (from which was excavated the famed "chacmool" sculpture) is noteworthy for both its time and place.

It is not the priority of excavation or recording that has endured in the historical perception of Le Plongeon, however, but rather the unorthodoxy of his interpretations. Early on, Le Plongeon was convinced that the ancient Maya constituted a sort of ancient "world mother culture" that fostered the spectacular accomplishments of ancient Egypt and other seats of high civilization. However, even in an age when raw data on culture and chronology remained relatively sparse and unorganized, Le Plongeon's speculations on the meanings of the ancient murals, sculptures, and architecture went blatantly far beyond the evidence. As a result, the whole of his labor became subject to ridicule by virtually all of his professional peers, and forever suspect.

As Jaime Litvak King notes in his excellent foreword in this book, Augustus Le Plongeon seems, in retrospect, larger than life. He crossed the stage of American arche-

ology just as the science was forming, and he appears to have been sent by Central Casting for the part: His bearded countenance stares formidably from these published images; he was apparently indefatigable, his conclusions were unique and controversial, and I would like very much to have known him.

For me, the primary value of *A Dream of Maya* lies in two areas. First, it makes avail-



Sculpture fragment represented by Augustus Le Plongeon as evidence for a connection between the Maya and Freemasonry. "As a Mason himself Augustus knew the symbolism of that secret order and found what he considered to be ample evidence of it at Uxmal," including a carved skull and crossbones carved on the Adivino Pyramid and this "sculptured torso with an inverted hand on an apron." After Le Plongeon "showed the piece to two American friends in Merida it disappeared, leaving only his sketch which he published in an article for *Harper's Weekly*" in 1881. [From *A Dream of Maya*]