But what about the dynamite?

Maya excavator merits awe

Dream of Maya: Augustus and Alice Le Plongeon in Nineteenth-Century Mexico

Book reviewers should approach their subjects impartially, not permitting any pre-conceptions or philosophies set in concrete to affect the critique.

To be quite honest, this reviewer opened *Dream of Maya* with definite ideas on the subject: to wit, Augustus Le Plongeon was a dreamer, at best, and an archaeologist who had convinced himself that the Maya were the cradle of civilization for the whole world and he used dynamite to "excavate" Uxmal. So he must have been crazy.

This book proves him to be a dreamer as well as a well-trained photographer who could develop his stereopticon negatives in makeshift darkrooms set up in inner rooms of the Governor’s Palace at Uxmal, with the help of a young, untaught archeologist who supervised and did so much excavating with his own hands in the suffocating heat of Yucatan that you have to respect him.

This American doctor of medicine, with his British-born wife, Alice, spent nearly 30 years at Chichen Itza and Uxmal, winning a side trip to Belize. All the years of excavating, theorizing, and working were paid for by whatever they could sell at exhibitions, photography, writing, and lecturing, and from their own limited personal funds, augmented with gifts and grants from prominent Americans here and there.

They spent a fortune, contracted disease, lived in horrendous conditions, learned Yucatecan Maya, knew Uxmal and Chichen Itza well, and yet cling to the idea that this was the center of the world.

Nothing could sway them from their conviction that this was the original Eden, that a Mayan princess whom Le Plongeon named Queen May Mo (from the Maya word for "macaw") was driven from Chichen Itza, reached Atlantis, and ended up in Egypt as the goddess Isis.

Now, I ask you—-it is, to say the least, a bit eccentric, isn't it?

At the Platform of the Eagles and Jaguars, the bearded doctor uncovered a figure with a bowl on its chest containing a jade bead and what Le Plongeon took to be the cremated heart of a personage he called Prince Chacmol (meaning "powerful warrior"), the brother of Queen Mo. The "heart" did prove to be an unidentified buried section of a human body. Back in the U.S., however, his editor changed the spelling to "chacmol" (which happened to mean "puma") which became the accepted name for Le Plongeon's statue and other subsequent similar discoveries.

The more this reviewer read, the greater grew the ignorance with this over-dedicated couple who were giving up their creature comforts, their very lives, to photograph and document a strange lost world under the hot sun, uncomplainingly, and primitive conditions, all to prove an unprovable theory.

But what about the dynamite? There was still that. How could this incredibly hard-working—if misguided—scientist blow up a site he was working on? Well, see page 81.

Hearing of the discovery of a fine sculpture thought to be Chacmol's brother, the administrator of the land on which Uxmal stood decided to carry off, for reuse elsewhere, the finely-polished building stones as well as the sculpture.

So... Dr. Le Plongeon put a notice in the local Merida newspaper stating he was placing dynamite near the statue. There was no dynamite. The plundering of the statues stopped but Le Plongeon that added another wrinkle to the coat of misconceptions he had long been wearing.

Le Plongeon was many contradictory things, but he and Alice worked incredibly hard and, in the mistaken case of attempting to relocate the cradle of civilization, put the Yucatecan Maya on the map. The book is fascinating and makes excellent reading even for those whose interest in the Maya has yet to be awakened. It is well written, well documented; in short, fascinating.

—Mary Louise Wilkinson

The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture, and Environmental Change Since 1492

Geographer David Watts has written an outstanding, encyclopedic reference volume on the Caribbean. Crammed with historical and geographic information from 1492 to the present, it contains a formidable bibliography and a superb set of maps and tables. Much of the book covers the history of sugar cultivation in the region with a treasure-trove of island facts and figures and cultivation techniques, colonial planters, slave-master ratios, and other information.

The particular strength of this work is in its emphasis on the effects of demography and agriculture on the West Indian environment. In his third chapter, surveys what is known about pre-colonial Indian life in the region and the man-environment equilibrium. The effects of European introduction of livestock, plants and woods, sugar cane, and other techniques are all carefully traced.

The examination of agricultural innovations from 1500 to 1833 and the emancipation of slaves as a fine piece of detective work. It both refutes the notion that plantation agriculture was technologically static during this period while accounting for the slow and skewed pace of change. Another chapter cogently takes readers through the 18th century colonial wars in the region and their effects island by island.

This attempt to study the effects of the environment over an extended historical period is to be commended. Not only do we understand the disappearance of much of the indigeneous wildlife, especially birds, but also the very early onset of soil erosion. "There is little doubt that the effect of development on environment within the islands of the Caribbean has overwhelmed it in a negative one... . Substantial environmental deterioration has taken place in almost all areas and not one island has been other than minimal." This is an invaluable reference work heavily synthesizing and organizing massive amounts of demographic, economic, geographic, environmental, and other data. Although the concentration is on the West Indies, there is ample material on Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and the French Antilles.

The marriage of geography, history, and environmental analysis is conceptually successful and ably supported by the massive collection of data. An all-around winner.

—Aaron Segal

The Jewish connection

The Latin American Community of Israel

Most of the 500,000 Latin American Jews live in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, and Mexico, and are urban middle and upper-middle class professionals and business people.

They face a declining birth rate and weakening of their institutions, family unity, identity, and practice of Judaism amid mixed marriages and anti-semitism. Younger people turn to social and sports organizations for group activities.

The author, a political scientist, maintains that many Jews

leaving their homelands due to political insignificance, persecution, or a preference for Israel over the Diaspora. Of the 100,000 who resettled in Israel, about 85 percent live in cities and 15 percent in agricultural and industrial settlements.

According to Mr. Herman, interviews point out that many of these Jews are fully integrated in Israeli society. Others speak Hebrew and maintain culturally but lack Israeli-born friends and full assimilation.

The author foresees future immigration. One question is whether the past and present immigrants will bring Latin American culture to bear on Israeli customs.

—James W. Cartly

REVIEWERS

Ms. Wilkinson, a Senior Reviewer and original Times of Haavanoff staffer, is past president of the Institute of Maya Studies in Houston.

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Mr. Cartly, a Senior Reviewer, is a professor of communications at Bethany College, W.Va.

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A Special 4-page Holiday Book Section

Publication notes

Caribbean Affairs, described in a brochure as "the region's most informative journal on and about the countries in the Caribbean Basin" and "written and edited exclusively by Caribbean people" is a quarterly, published by the Trinidad Express Newspapers Ltd., P.O. Box 1252, Port of Spain, Trinidad (US$20 for four issues). Noting that Caribbean issues are always discussed from the perspective of North American and European scholars, Caribbean Affairs presents the region's own views by "an abundance of scholars, businessmen, and journalists who have intelligence and wit."

Andean Newsletter is a publication of the Andean Commission of Jurists, "a non-governmental organization and consultative status at the UN." Its stated objective is to provide current information about human rights, drug trafficking, the rule of law, and other important themes concerning the Andean countries. Edited by Diego Garcia-Sayam, World Los Suace 285, Lima 27, Peru.