

OF FACTS AND HEARSAY: BRINGING AUGUSTUS LE PLONGEON INTO FOCUS

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False facts are highly injurious to the progress of science,
for they often long endure; but false views, if supported by
some evidence, do little harm, as every one takes a salutary
pleasure in proving their falseness; and when this is done,
one path towards error is closed, and the truth is often at
the same time opened.

—Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man,
and Selection in Relation to Sex*

SEARCHING FOR AUGUSTUS LE PLONGEON

It is hard to find a person with a less attractive image in the history of American archaeology than that of Augustus Le Plongeon. He was thrust, suddenly, into my life in 1977 when I was teaching a class on Mesoamerican archaeology at Foothill College in California. I thought it important that my students should have some background on the history of Mayan studies, so in preparing for a lecture, I read Robert Wauchope's account of Le Plongeon in his book *Lost Tribes and Sunken Continents*.

According to Robert Wauchope, Le Plongeon's "arrogant flaunting of his own ego produced a lurid epoch in the history of American archaeology" (1962:8). The idea that a "lurid epoch" could be produced by one archaeologist seemed an overstatement, but, intrigued, I looked for more background material.

Robert Brunhouse's book about eight archaeologists, *In Search of the Maya*, published a decade later, gave a somewhat more balanced view of Le Plongeon. He stated of Wauchope's work that it "gives the best introduction to the story of the Le Plongeon's" (1973: 229). The activities of Le Plongeon's wife, Alice, were noted; however, her contributions were minimized by the suggestion that her husband was the

source of all her ideas. Le Plongeon was summarized as "mysterious, preposterous, opinionated, haphazardly informed, reckless, and a remarkable person" (1973 :137, 164).

Brunhouse cited a letter about Le Plongeon written in 1931 by Sylvanus Morley, director of the Carnegie Institution's Chichen Itza project, to Carnegie director John C. Merriam. I wrote for a copy of the letter and received it two weeks later. The letter hooked me. It was Morley's account of his day long interview with a friend of the Le Plongeon's, Maude Blackwell, in whom they had entrusted their lifework (10 October 1931, Carnegie Institution of Washington). Blackwell told Morley and archaeologist Karl Ruppert that she had in her possession all the Le Plongeon photographs, notes, and unpublished manuscripts and that she was interested in passing those materials on to the Carnegie Institution. In the letter Morley also stated that Blackwell knew about the Le Plongeon's discovery of Mayan codices in the Akab Dzib at Chichen Itza and in the Adivino Pyramid at Uxmal. Unfortunately, because Morley criticized Le Plongeon's theories about cultural diffusion too strongly, Blackwell was offended and refused to sell the collection. She then turned to a more sympathetic person, Manly P. Hall, president of the Philosophical Research Society in Los Angeles, and in the fall of 1931, the society bought the collection.

I began to dig into the Le Plongeon archival materials in earnest and naively imagined that it would not take long to come to some incontrovertible conclusions about the "Old Doctor" and Alice—it was time to clear up the so-called mysteries about them. I soon discovered, however, that it was too early for any meaningful interpretation. So instead, I collected articles, purchased or copied their books, dug into archives and libraries, and read all the correspondence to and from and about them I could find. I also interviewed scholars for their opinions on the Le Plongeon's and placed ads in newspapers for lost Le Plongeon materials as well as for leads about Augustus' childhood on the island of Jersey and Alice's in London. My enthusiasm was somewhat dampened by the negative reaction of some archaeologists to my research subject. They wondered how I could possibly want to pursue research on such a loser. It appeared that for most archaeologists, the Le Plongeon case was closed.

Augustus Le Plongeon, one of the earliest individuals to investigate extensively the Maya, had been dismissed since the turn of the century by nearly all Mayan scholars as little more than a troublesome eccentric. He had spent considerable time working in Yucatan, but his theory that the Maya founded world civilization never found support in the scholarly community. His extraordinary record of Mayan sites documented by photography, drawings, and plans was all but forgotten.

Alice Dixon Le Plongeon has been characterized by writers of late as no more than a faithful follower of her husband, a "young and lovely bride" parroting his bizarre theories (Brunhouse 1973:137; Wauchope 1962:8). But Alice was a true pioneer in the study of the Maya (Desmond 1988). She went to Yucatan in 1873, fresh from London, and spent 11 years among the Maya and the ancient ruins, learned the language and local customs, and published books and numerous journal articles. Around the turn of the

century, her contribution to understanding Mayan civilization was noted in the *Scientific American* (*A Woman Archaeologist* 1895), but within 20 years she was all but forgotten, except for a few minor notices by the last defenders of the Le Plongeons.

Fortunately, I had been corresponding with Dennis Puleston at the University of Minnesota. He encouraged me to continue my investigations into Le Plongeon and agreed to spend time with me, after the 1978 Palenque Mesa Redonda, at Chichen Itza to search for evidence that Le Plongeon had found Mayan codices in the Akab Dzib. Lewis C. "Skip" Messenger, his graduate student, and Phyllis Messenger also assisted in the work at Chichen Itza. After no more than a visual inspection of the Akab Dzib, however, our project abruptly ended when Puleston was tragically killed by lightning atop the Castillo Pyramid. Stunned, but determined to continue my work on Le Plongeon, I drove from Mexico to Washington, D.C., stopping on the way at Tulane University's Latin American Library in New Orleans. To my delight I found that the correspondence from Maude Blackwell to Frans Blom about the Le Plongeon photographic collection had been preserved along with a few photographs and Le Plongeon's plans of the Akab Dzib at Chichen Itza and the Governor's Palace at Uxmal. In her letters to Blom, as in her interview by Morley, Blackwell revealed that, on her deathbed, Alice Le Plongeon had told her the location of Mayan codices (Blackwell to Blom, 1931, Latin American Library, Tulane University). According to Blackwell they had been found and then reburied at Uxmal and Chichen Itza, but she gave Blom only vague instructions about their location.

My next stop was the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts, where I read the hundred or so letters from Le Plongeon to his patron at the society, Stephen Salisbury, Jr. The letters gave Salisbury an accounting of the Le Plongeons' theories, travels, and discoveries; complaints about rivals; and in one letter Le Plongeon offered for sale 70 "views" of Belize for 10 dollars each. Today only 15 of his photographs of Belize are known to have survived.

In Washington, D.C., I visited the Library of Congress which contained letters to Ephraim G. Squier from Augustus, and also the Smithsonian Institution where there were a number of letters to Spencer Baird and William McGee. The letters to Squier had originated from Lima, Peru, where Le Plongeon was attempting to find a permanent position in the diplomatic corps and asked Squier for assistance. In addition to a medical clinic, Le Plongeon had a photographic studio in Lima and may have taken a significant number of Squier's Peruvian archaeological photos. Le Plongeon's letters from Belize in the late 1870s bitterly complain to Salisbury that Squier had published his photographs without his consent and without giving him credit or financial compensation. Le Plongeon had written to Baird asking for funding to build a Mayan temple from his molds at an exposition in New Orleans, but high fire-insurance rates caused them to decide against the project. A letter to McGee answered his inquiry about a Mayan dictionary that they were preparing to publish.

Because most of the Carnegie Institution's archival holdings of archaeological materials had been transferred to the Peabody Museum at Harvard University, I realized there

would be little of direct relevance for me there. All the same, I spent an afternoon going through their archives with the hope that something might turn up, but I found nothing on the Le Plongeons.

All the institutions I visited were extremely helpful, and I found the limited photocopying rule, 10 pages per day, at the American Antiquarian Society a small inconvenience. Their curatorial staff, then headed by William Joyce, was of great assistance and always kept a watchful eye. On one occasion, racing to finish reading materials before closing time, I had not placed the Le Plongeon letters squarely back in their folders and was reminded of the proper way!

At this early stage in the research, my interests were divided between determining the nature of Augustus' contribution to American archaeology and finding out if he had actually uncovered Mayan codices. While I suspected a hoax, I must admit that it was more exciting to look for clues leading to the location of the Mayan "treasure" than to wrestle with Le Plongeon's theories and lifetime of scholarly maneuverings, and this possibility kept me reading his rambling handwritten letters.

Augustus had several professions during his life, including photography, medicine, and archaeology, that gave me logical paths of inquiry. An evaluation of his photography and archaeology was far easier than an evaluation of his medical career. It took some digging into the history of the medical profession to find answers to how Augustus might have been trained as a doctor, and how useful his "electro-hydropathic" clinic in Lima was.

The search for every trace of Le Plongeon took me to evermore obscure corners. He was a Freemason, and during her last years, Alice had contact with the Theosophical Society founded by Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. In 1890 Alice delivered a lecture titled "The Mayas" to the Blavatsky Lodge of the society (Le Plongeon 1890). In 1913, The Word Magazine, another publication of the society, published posthumously Le Plongeon's key work on the founding of Egypt by the Maya, "The Origin of the Egyptians" (Le Plongeon 1913-1914).

In New York I visited the Theosophical Society of America, the Olcott Library, and the United Lodge of Theosophists; in Worcester, Massachusetts, the Masonic Temple; in Washington, D.C., the library of the Supreme Council 33, Scottish Rite; in Spring Valley, New York, the Anthroposophical Society (they had published a paperback reprint of Le Plongeon's book on Mayan cultural diffusion, Queen Moo and the Egyptian Sphinx), and later in the year, the Theosophy Company in Los Angeles. I was never able to establish a direct connection between the Le Plongeons and Theosophy, and I have never been able to determine Le Plongeon's grade or lodge in Freemasonry.

While nothing turned up from those institutions, surprises often surfaced when least expected. In the basement of the Brooklyn Museum while looking at an assortment of artifacts from Mexico, I noticed an old, broken filing cabinet. The bottom drawer was open and a folder said "Spinden." The only letter in the folder was from art historian Herbert Spinden to a Mr. Linklater. In it he made a number of critical comments about

Le Plongeon's theories, which he felt had "not the slightest archaeological justification," but he went on to say that "Le Plongeon did some really good excavating at Uxmal . . . and at Chichen Itza discovered the famous Chacmool" (25 March 1947, Brooklyn Museum). I was encouraged to look further into Le Plongeon's fieldwork.

A second surprise occurred in New York during a visit to the American Museum of Natural History. I wanted to inventory artifacts that the Le Plongeon's had sold to the museum around the turn of the century. Gordon Ekholm, curator emeritus of Mesoamerican archaeology, stated he had received a trunk in the mid-1950s with Le Plongeon's negatives and prints. A storage company in Brooklyn had delivered the trunk to anthropologist William Duncan Strong at Columbia University, but Strong sent the trunk to the museum because he felt the contents were more appropriate to a museum collection. The trunk contained a few of Maude Blackwell's personal items and some of Augustus Le Plongeon's materials: 22 collodion glass-plate negatives, 118 albumen prints, and 29 lantern slides. This cache was an exciting find and a great motivator, keeping me on the trail of Le Plongeon materials in spite of my worries about funding to keep the project going— I had financed the project from my own resources.

In Brooklyn, I searched for the Le Plongeon's last residence at 18 Sidney Place, I found the building, but it yielded nothing. According to the landlord, it had been completely renovated in the early 1970s.

The Long Island Historical Society held a single-page "Memorial to Augustus Le Plongeon" written by Alice, which told the story of Le Plongeon's cremation at Fresh Pond and the scattering of his ashes at sea by a deeply grieving Alice. I had to copy the page by hand because the photocopy machine was not operating, and a year later when I went back for another look, I was told the memorial had been sold to a bookstore in Manhattan. When I raced to the bookstore I found the item had been purchased by an unknown buyer. My first review of archival materials in East Coast institutions completed, I returned to my archaeological job in California with my backpack full of photocopied materials and notes.

Late in 1978 I drove to Los Angeles to determine the extent of a collection of Le Plongeon photographs that were reported to be at the Philosophical Research Society. I asked the head librarian if they might have some old photographs by Augustus Le Plongeon. To my delight she said they had "quite a few," and then asked me if I would like to step into Manly Hall's office and talk with him. Hall was most enthusiastic about my interest in the Le Plongeon materials and asked if he might help me. I told him I was planning a book about Le Plongeon and would like to work with the photographs. He thought it was a splendid idea, encouraged me to put them to good use, and wished me well. Hall's generosity was important because it allowed me to check firsthand the quality of Le Plongeon's photographic fieldwork. With the exception of ethnohistorian H. B. Nicholson, few persons outside the Philosophical Research Society were aware of the collection or of its importance.

I spent the rest of the day looking: at the 300 negatives and 234 prints. There were also 25 tracings of sections of the murals in the Upper Temple of the Jaguars at Chichen Itza

in the collection. The tracings, made in 1875, were the first copies of those important Mayan murals and were still in excellent condition. In addition, the collection included a few pages of the Le Plongeons' field notes from the excavation of the Platform of Venus at Chichen Itza, some miscellaneous letters, and the original handwritten manuscript of Le Plongeon's book-length article "The Origin of the Egyptians" (Le Plongeon 1913-1914).

I was surprised at the thoroughness of Augustus Le Plongeon's photographic work. For example, at Uxmal, working from a ladder to prevent distortion, he recorded the magnificent 320-foot-long east facade of the Governor's Palace in 16 overlapping stereopticon photographs. He also made five-by-eight-inch close-up and stereo photos of all the intricate and important motifs on the west face of the Chenes Temple of the Adivino Pyramid. From the top of the pyramid, he created a stereo photographic panorama of the site from the Governor's Palace to the Nunnery Quadrangle—almost 180 degrees.

At Chichen Itza, he created a photographic mural in stereo of the bas-reliefs in the Lower Temple of the Jaguars. He photographed all the major structures from a number of angles, all bas-reliefs in the central part of the site, and recorded his archaeological excavations of the Platform of the Eagles and Jaguars and the Platform of Venus with written notes and photographs. A number of the images show Alice working in pants with a skirt rolled up around her waist. When she was around the Mayan women, she rolled the skirt down to avoid offending them. Other photos depict friends of the Le Plongeons in the ruins and in Merida, some ethnographic shots of the Maya, and a few photographs from their stay in Belize.

I left for Yucatan in February 1980 with prints of the negatives to identify each photo, prepared to photograph each scene in black-and-white and in color. Once at Chichen Itza, the work of photo corroboration went smoothly because the site is now cleared of forest, and the buildings have been repaired and consolidated. The Le Plongeons had to have the vegetation chopped down to photograph the Mayan buildings in the 1870s. The immenseness of the work is apparent in his photograph of the Great Ball Court where only the west half of the playing field has been cleared showing the full height and density of the tropical forest. The bas-reliefs too showed considerable change over the last 100 years. In the Le Plongeons' photos whole motifs with sharp crisp lines are evident, where today the surfaces are rounded. In a few instances elements in motifs or parts of buildings are missing.

After my return from Mexico, I called on photographers Pirkle Jones and Ansel Adams for their opinions about the Le Plongeon photographs. Jones, a professor of photography at the San Francisco Art Institute, has had extensive experience with nineteenth-century photographs. His opinion was that while the negatives were technically excellent, better images would have resulted had I printed them using the nineteenth-century albumen printing-out process because modern photographic papers cannot reproduce shadow detail from collodion glass-plate negatives as well. Lacking the experience and time for such an ambitious undertaking, I decided that prints made

on current photographic materials would have to suffice for publication purposes. Ansel Adams generously devoted an afternoon to looking over the Le Plongeon prints in his house in Big Sur, and both he and his wife, Virginia, fascinated by the story of the Le Plongeon and the conditions under which the photos were taken, encouraged me to have them published.

During the summer I decided to make another trip east because I felt my understanding of the Le Plongeon materials was still too superficial. My first stop was the American Antiquarian Society, and after reviewing the materials there, I traveled to the Peabody Museum at Harvard University. I learned of another collection of Le Plongeon photos at Harvard from Daniel Jones, curator of photography. There were 135 prints in the collection, and 124 had been mounted on large cardboard backings for display at the American Antiquarian Society and then transferred to the Peabody Museum around the turn of the century. Most were duplicates of photos at the Philosophical Research Society and at the American Museum of Natural History, but they were, nevertheless, in excellent condition and filled a few gaps in the other collections.

At Harvard two important events occurred. The first was my introduction to Gordon Willey by art historian Linnea Wren. She thought that I should discuss my ideas about Le Plongeon with him. Willey brought to my attention problems of "core and fringe" in archaeological scholarship and felt a thorough analysis of Le Plongeon's work might be a valuable addition to our knowledge of early pioneers in Mayan studies.

The next day, while I was at the museum again, Ian Graham gave me a letter written by Augustus Le Plongeon to Charles P. Bowditch, a patron of the Peabody Museum. Bowditch had been interested in Le Plongeon's interpretations of Mayan hieroglyphics and had attempted to get him to divulge where he thought Mayan codices might be hidden. Augustus answered:

[I] may be induced perhaps, to mention some of the places where such records may still exist and where some years ago, I began to look, when my researches were interrupted by events beyond my control. I have no objection to tell you that, in my own mind, I am convinced that very ancient Mss. exist at Chichen.... If I had money of my own I would be willing to spend it to bring to light these ancient books [Le Plongeon, Augustus 28 May 1907, Peabody Museum, Harvard University].

Now I had evidence that the Le Plongeon had never uncovered Mayan codices, and I understood why I had never found any archival evidence. The story had been contrived by Blackwell after all.

Elated that I was getting some results from all my research, I traveled to the American Museum of Natural History to search their storage rooms for molds made by Augustus Le Plongeon. A few months earlier at the Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley, I had read letters from Alice Le Plongeon to Phoebe Hearst in which she

stated that they had deposited 264 papier-mache molds made at Chichen Itza and Uxmal at the American Museum of Natural History. Also at the Philosophical Research Society, I had seen a photograph of Le Plongeon on a scaffold making a mold of the center motif of the Governor's Palace. So I wrote the museum asking to see the molds during my trip, but they replied that they had no Le Plongeon molds in storage. Because the molds were so important to my research, I was determined to look for them personally. I called Gordon Ekholm to see if he could help me. He invited me to spend the day with him searching, but we found no trace. The only remaining evidence was an inventory of the collection. Had I been able to see the molds, I would have learned more about Le Plongeon's fieldwork. Even his rivals had described them as "exquisite" and I wanted to see them for myself.

From New York I traveled to Minnesota and spent the next six weeks in the Messengers' basement study writing up my notes and trying to develop a basic chronology of Alice's and Augustus' lives. It was a good beginning.

ACADEMIC TEXT

How can one deal with so many facts—
so many and so many and so many?
—Virginia Woolf

In January 1981 I began my doctoral studies at the University of Colorado and early in the fall semester asked Russ McGoodwin to supervise my dissertation on Le Plongeon. I needed a scholar and strategist with McGoodwin's skills to supervise my work and steer it through the political labyrinth.

I proposed focusing on Augustus in the context of the history of archaeological studies of the Maya. It seemed to me that a study of his life could be a lens through which we might better understand the early development of Mayan studies. In my efforts to evaluate the theories proposed by Le Plongeon in *Queen Moo*, as well as in "The Origin of the Egyptians," I found it fruitful not to dissect every speculation but instead to maintain an intellectual distance to avoid being drawn into his ever-expanding web of speculations. So outlandish were some of his claims that it would seem his intention was mainly to stir up debate.

Another line of attack was to read what his contemporaries said of him. During the 1870s and 1880s, a battle had pitted Le Plongeon against scholars Daniel Brinton, Samuel Haven, and Philipp Valentini, over the issue of cultural diffusion. Brinton had accused him of being-"eccentric" (1890:439). Le Plongeon was incensed that those he considered armchair scholars should criticize one who had worked so long and diligently in the field. He challenged Brinton to a public debate, but Brinton made no reply to the challenge. This event was the beginning of the end for Le Plongeon's credibility as a professional scholar.

I found Le Plongeon's proposal that the Maya were the founders of Egyptian civilization only a new twist on Charles E. Brasseur de Bourbourg's (1868) thesis that the New World was the source of world civilization. Brasseur had proposed his theory in the 1860s, and within a few years, it had been rejected by scholars as lacking evidence. Le Plongeon, convinced of the correctness of his own interpretation of Mayan iconography and murals by his discovery of the statue he called Chaacmol (now Chacmool), tenaciously held to the idea that the Maya had diffused culture throughout the ancient world.

By 1890, still writing and lecturing on Mayan cultural diffusion, Le Plongeon found that fewer and fewer archaeologists were willing to listen to him. Bitter at being ignored and unrecognized for his pioneering work by those in the mainstream, he became evermore isolated from the developing profession of archaeology, until finally he was totally rejected, although never completely forgotten. Since his death in 1908, stories about Le Plongeon, his theories, and his exploits, have passed from one generation of archaeologists to the next, and understandably, few writers have transcended basically anecdotal appraisals.

Manly Hall, however, in an article in *Horizon*, was perhaps the first writer to offer a more comprehensive assessment of the Le Plongeon's contribution to Mayan archaeology. He wrote:

Le Plongeon could not censor his discoveries by referring to the learned texts of other authors. He did not have the benefit of the works of the great institutions, which have since spent millions and sent dozens of experts to examine the field. He and his wife could report only what they actually found, but it was impossible for them to be in the presence of so many wonders without doing a little wondering themselves [Hall 1948:29].

Wauchope's and Brunhouse's critical accounts were an important foundation for my work because they brought together the facts and the hearsay about Augustus and Alice. Brunhouse's bibliography, even if not all-inclusive, is still an important resource. This phase of my research culminated in 1983 with the successful defense of my dissertation, "Augustus Le Plongeon: Early Maya Archaeologist," (Desmond 1983) before a committee of archaeologists, physical anthropologists, an Egyptologist, ethnologists, and a historian of religions.

BIOGRAPHIC TEXT

It is perhaps as difficult to write a
good life as to live one.
—Lytton Strachey

Within a year I sent a revised manuscript to the University of New Mexico Press. Luther Wilson, director of the press, and editor Beth Hadas, who subsequently became director, were eager for a book on Augustus Le Plongeon. But my revision of the dissertation was not acceptable—I was told that a complete rewrite would be necessary. Practically exhausted at this point by Augustus and Alice, I dreaded the thought of additional years of rewriting the manuscript.

Then in 1984 the whole depressing situation was changed. During a break in the annual Society for American Archaeology meetings, Phyllis Messenger, a longtime friend and colleague, agreed, after some insistence on the part of Luther and Beth, to help me rewrite the book. Phyllis inherited what some writers might call an "academic narrative." Such narratives are "meticulous in . . . detail, and scrupulous in . . . documentation . . . inclusive, archival and comprehensive in detail acting as records rather than responses to life" (Nadel 1984:113). The narrative did not flow. Following Beth's advice, we decided to switch to a more biographical, hence chronological, style. Phyllis took scissors and file folders and literally cut my manuscript apart. Each folder was an episode or time period, and we began long discussions about the material assigned to each folder. We looked at the photographs as a kind of visual diary and found new clues.

As Phyllis began taping the manuscript back together, it became a mosaic of typed chunks held together by handwritten phrases. This was the skeleton of a new narrative that would be fleshed out over the next two and a half years in at least half a dozen major rewrites.

The reworking raised a number of new questions, and we both went back to the original sources to hash out new interpretations. As we got to know the Le Plongeon better, we added bits of personality to the story and made some assumptions about why they behaved in certain ways at certain times. We decided to paraphrase their writings to make the story read more smoothly and to reduce the number of footnotes. One conclusion we reached was that Alice made a major literary contribution and deserves more attention than she has received.

Somewhere in the middle of this process, Luther Wilson pointed out to me that Phyllis in reality was my coauthor, not an editor. After all, her contribution had become an essential ingredient in the book. He was right, and she readily agreed.

The serious rewriting began. We had lots of help and encouragement from our editor Claire Sanderson, though her limit of 50 photographs forced us into painful decisions. (Our first list of "absolutely essential" photos totaled about 140.) We added life to the finished product with new chapter titles and opening quotes for each chapter, to set the stage for a major event in the chapter, and with line-drawing figures from the Le

Plongeons' tracings of the murals in the Upper Temple of the Jaguars, to illustrate subtly an idea in each chapter.

Our book *A Dream of Maya* (Desmond and Messenger 1988) is not excessively burdened with "meticulous detail," but it still retains the essential documentation. Phyllis summarized our intention when she said in the preface, "I hope that we have succeeded in helping them [the Le Plongeons] live again" [Desmond and Messenger 1988:xvii].

CONCLUSIONS

For ten years the Le Plongeons were the central focus of my research life, and early on my friends and colleagues noticed the all-consuming nature of my work. I became immersed, almost totally, in the subject; however, the volume of data and diversity of interpretive problems would have all but prevented completion had I not been single-minded.

Looking back, I am not unhappy with the pace and length of the project. From the beginning a good balance developed between acquisition of materials and my ability to interpret them. The collection of bibliographic sources from San Francisco area university libraries proceeded quickly enough, and visits to distant archives were not unduly delayed by my employment responsibilities or even by my lack of funds.

My dissertation, the product of the first phase of the project, is the centerpiece and holds as much about the Le Plongeons as could be uncovered. With so much misinformation and confusion about them, such a record was needed, but I was, at first, very reluctant to "dilute" it by a rewrite in biographical style. I soon learned a dissertation and a biography are not self-exclusive but can complement each other, and when properly set forth, they can provide readers with additional insights and a clearer picture of the lives portrayed.

A great number of persons have, in a cumulative sense, influenced my portrayal of the Le Plongeons by critically reading my account and making suggestions, but Russ McGoodwin and Phyllis Messenger have contributed most directly to the development of my overall conclusions. McGoodwin, with sharp pencil in hand, helped me in the early stages to find my way through "so many facts," whereas Phyllis has brought a literary dimension to the work and elaborated on it without diminishing the factual account.

This, then, is the summarizing analysis of the Le Plongeons that has emerged. Alice Le Plungeon arrived in Yucatan as a young woman, seeing the world for the first time. As one of the earliest European women to work in that area, she had to make her own rules as she went along. She quickly learned the skills she needed to be her husband's partner in their work. And on her own she made significant contributions to the understanding of the social history and living conditions of the Maya [Desmond and Messenger 1988].

Augustus Le Plungeon was representative of many mid-nineteenth century explorer-scholars, an educated man who was unencumbered by the geographic or disciplinary

boundaries that were being forged at the time and that he chose to ignore if they did not fit his need or worldview. His experiences around the world must have led him to think that with a little research and experimentation he could discover or prove any hunch or perfect any process. This attitude served him well in his surveying and photographic careers, and similarly, he met with little opposition in his experiments and writings about earthquakes and "electro-hydropathic" medicine. But when he proceeded in this manner in his studies of world civilizations, he met with far less success. Refusing to compromise, he fought on until his death, suffering rejection by the very same established scholars whom he had regarded as lesser intellects.

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