

SAMUEL KIRKLAND LOTHROP, 1892–1965

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THE MINUTE he received word of Sam's death, Herbert Maryon, O.B.E., the dean of ancient metalwork and one of Sam's many friends and admirers, wrote from Edinburgh expressing his sorrow and adding, "Useful men like him are too few to lose even one of them." Now "useful" may not be the adjective that many of us would have selected, but the Oxford English Dictionary and Webster's New International bear out Maryon as a precise and accurate man. The preferred meaning in the former is "having the qualities to bring about good or advantage" while one of the examples in the latter is "a useful man in his profession." Sam had in abundance the qualities to bring about good or advantage and certainly brought about good and advantage in and beyond his profession.

Another friend and admirer, Alfonso Caso, wrote to say, "*Lamento mucho saber que ha muerto Sam Lothrop, uno de los arqueólogos de la vieja guardia. Sus investigaciones fueron siempre de primer orden.*"

He was indeed one of the "old guard" and was for many of us a link with the past, with such worthies as William H. Holmes and Sylvanus G. Morley. This is brought out to some degree in his nostalgic essay "Archaeology, Then and Now." It was his and our good fortune that he entered the field before methodology and exaggerated specialization began to exert a stifling influence. The New World was his oyster, and he managed to cover most of it as no man has or is ever likely to do.

Starting his dirt archaeology at Pecos under A. V. Kidder the year he graduated from Harvard, he went on to field work in highland Guatemala, Puerto Rico, British Honduras, Yucatán, the Petén, El Salvador, Costa Rica, the Paraná Delta, Patagonia, Chile, Peru, and several seasons in Panama.

Sam's insatiable intellectual curiosity and wide range of interests led him into every facet of New World prehistory and also into ethnology. He wrote with brilliance and clarity on pottery, lapidary work, fine metalwork, navigation, and, together with Rivet and Nordenskiöld, was one of the first to consult technical specialists instead of dreaming up technological phantasies. He was a born storyteller and wrote

as engagingly as he talked. He did not belong to the school that resorts to a self-conscious and contrived jargon "to the end that their discipline [may] not be made common among the vulgar," in the words of the great jurist Sir Edward Coke. Each of his major publications is a complete and well-ordered account in which the finds and field data are not merely presented but placed in their proper setting, geographically, historically by reference to the early chronicles, artistically, and technologically. He also tried to avoid what Caso has rightly termed "*clasificaciones cada vez más perfectas e inútiles,*" which clutter up so much archaeological literature. In fact, everything Sam wrote can be read with profit and enjoyment by any intelligent layman.

In many senses he was unorthodox and a maverick, but he was a useful one. I understand that he had no students and never taught formally (he had an occasional talented assistant). However, few men have had such a profound influence on Americanist studies and won such wide acclaim both here and abroad. His publications are only one facet. In addition, there is his enrichment of the collections of many museums in this country and abroad. His numerous attainments, honors, and awards can be found readily in *Who's Who in America*.

One of the distinctions that meant the most to him had its amusing side. It was *Essays in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology*, which could not be called a *Festschrift* under a rule of the syndics of the Harvard University Press. Moreover, to make compliance with that rule doubly sure, the editors invited Sam to lend his name as the principal author and contribute two essays. It is doubtful whether anyone was fooled, and Sam enjoyed being probably the only man ever to be a contributor to his own *Festschrift*. Occasionally Mr. Justice Holmes used to preface a remark with "If I may quote myself." Since the Harvard University Press's writ of injunction does not run to *American Antiquity*, and since I feel that Sam's great contributions to ancient metal technology have never received the recognition they deserve, I propose to quote a few personal words that were deleted from my modest *Essay* under the rule just mentioned.



Samuel K. Lothrop (photograph by Nickolas Muray)

It is scarcely possible to think, talk or write about fine metalwork in the New World before Columbus without being reminded of our debt to Samuel Kirkland Lothrop. By his brilliant studies and the encouragement he has given others he has done more than any scholar in this country to focus attention on this somewhat neglected aspect of early indigenous craftsmanship.

Sam never regarded archaeology as the preserve of a small elite where lay trespassers had best keep out. Instead of retiring to an ivory tower and wringing his hands to no effect, he acted when the occasion demanded it. When he saw he could not lick a group of amateur pot hunters in Panama, he had sufficient breadth and imagination to join them and help organize them into a respectable and responsible archaeological society, thus saving data on stratigraphy and grave associations that otherwise would have been irretrievably lost.

A wartime assignment in Peru left him with a fair amount of free time, which he put to use cultivating the *huaqueros* in and around Lima. Sometimes he followed in their wake picking up significant items they had passed over, and at others he would buy unique pieces from them. Usually he would telephone Tello, invite him to come over to his hotel for a drink, and then

give him his choice of the "finds." In this way many great rarities came to enrich the collections of the Museo Nacional, and an enduring relationship of mutual trust and confidence was established.

After Tello's death, Sam was to a great degree responsible for the publication of the first Tello volume on Paracas under the auspices of the Institute of Andean Research.

Sam always held the Institute in high regard. He was one of its founders in 1937, served with distinction as its President for many terms, and was active in its affairs up to the time of his death. It was no accident that in his last book the only affiliation that he listed on the title page was "Institute of Andean Research." That book was a great disappointment to Sam; apparently there were more than the usual number of author-versus-publisher situations, with the author losing virtually every round.

His interest in model boats was legendary, and the amazing scale model he made of a balsam raft was perfect in every detail. When he went to Madrid to work on his last book, one of the first things he did was to acquire a model of a Spanish fishing boat in the flea market. Despite his illness during the Congress, he saw Junius Bird and proudly showed off that model, discussing its fine points with enthusiasm and understanding.

Sam was also a noted bibliophile and built one of the finest private libraries ever assembled on the archaeology and prehistory of the New World.

Although he craved and stimulated company, he maintained a certain area of reserve to which no one else was privy. That may have been the proper Bostonian. Along with that reserve went a high degree of caution. Sam rarely went out on a limb and would have agreed with his fellow-Yankee, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., that "Certitude is not the test of certainty. We have been cocksure of many things that were not so."

Sam will always be remembered as a kind, decent, generous, and thoughtful man. The countless times he gave of himself to help others will never all be known. As a single personal example, I happened to mention casually in a letter to him in Madrid last year that my wife was writing a paper on a subject in which he was interested. Notwithstanding the discomfort of his converging ailments, he sat down immediately and wrote her longhand what was in

effect almost a treatise, drawing upon his vast experience and prodigious memory. Literally dozens of others can repeat similar experiences. In an academic discipline or profession not noted for mutual esteem or observance of the rules of the Marquis of Queensbury, I never heard Sam utter an unkind word about a professional colleague—or anyone else, for that matter. By the same token, I have never heard a mean or unkind word about Sam. If you seek his monument, for me that is it.

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