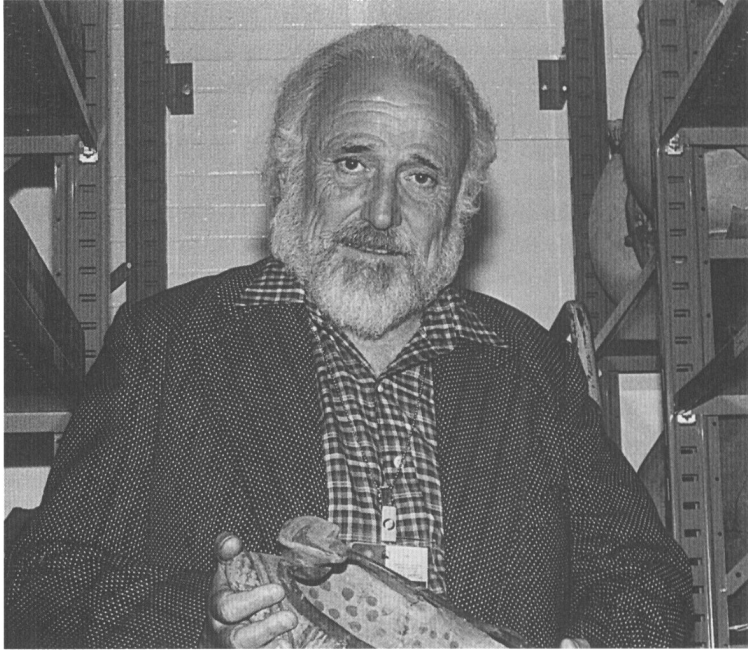


DONALD WARD LATHRAP

1927–1990



Donald W. Lathrap, a professor of anthropology at the University of Illinois who made his most important mark in archaeology through the study of South American cultural history, died of an embolism following abdominal surgery in May 1990.

Lathrap was born in California on April 4, 1927, and graduated from Berkeley High School. In 1950 he received his A.B. degree in anthropology from the University of California at Berkeley, where Alfred L. Kroeber and Carl Sauer inspired Lathrap's intellectual achievements. Kroeber provided Lathrap with an interest in the historical development of cultures, while Sauer's theory of plant domestication in the tropics sparked his interest in the culture history of New World tropical forest environments (Sauer 1952).

At Berkeley, Lathrap worked as an assistant archaeologist for the California Archaeological Survey and published a number of papers on California archaeology (Oliver 1992:286). Unfortunately, he never had the opportunity to be a major influence on the interpretation of California cultural history. Had he fulfilled his dream of returning to his family home in Surprise Valley on his retirement, he might have contributed greatly to the understanding of the archaeological record in the American West as well. In one of his most recent works, Lathrap and R. C. Troike joined their expertise in California archaeology and linguistics to model the dynamics of West Coast culture history (Lathrap and Troike

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1988). Using their understanding of linguistics, they suggested that the West Coast was an important corridor and had been occupied earlier than generally accepted today.

Before entering graduate school at Harvard University, Lathrap worked at Berkeley's Lowie Museum of Anthropology (now the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology) where he learned that material culture is a valuable source for historical research. He developed special abilities for analyzing collections and retrieving cultural data from well-documented artifacts. As a result of this early contact with museum research, he encouraged his students to work with museum collections, and in his later career, he curated several museum exhibits. His most influential exhibit, "Ancient Ecuador: Culture, Clay and Creativity 3000–300 B.C.," was organized for the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago and traveled to many major museums (Lathrap et al. 1975). In 1975 he was appointed a research associate with the Department of Anthropology at the Field Museum.

As a graduate student at Harvard University in 1954, he worked with Gordon Willey, Clyde Kluckhohn, and Philip Phillips. Willey directed his doctoral research. Lathrap intended to carry out fieldwork in the tropical Maya lowlands. However, when the opportunity to work in the montaña of eastern Peru appeared, he recognized the opportunity to reform the accepted interpretation of South American cultural history. Before his work was made known, South American archaeology was largely the study of the prehistory of the area occupied by the Inka. The cultures of other areas were largely thought of as marginal. Lathrap began his dissertation work in 1956 with a small grant from the American Museum of Natural History and the encouragement of Harry Tschopik, Jr. (Oliver 1992:287). At San Francisco de Yarínacocha, Peru, he established his camp in the matrilocal compound of Segundina Rinijo. He hired two Shipibo workers, Catalino Cumapa and Manuelito Rinijo. These assistants were quick to learn the techniques of excavation and survey, and they were able to teach Lathrap much about tropical forest culture.

Lathrap's dissertation was completed in 1962 but was never published. Later, his book, *The Upper Amazon*, summarized the data in the dissertation and established the chronological framework for the nearly 4,000-year sequence of ceramic-producing people in the Upper Amazon. This long sequence had a time depth equivalent to anything known for other parts of Peru. He found that the first 2,000 years of the ceramic sequence were relatively stable with one style evolving into the next. The latter part of the archaeological record showed a sequence of completely distinct ceramic styles. This suggested to him that the area was occupied by a single evolving group from 2050 B.C. until about A.D. 450, when diverse peoples entered the area. His interpretation of the Upper Amazon contrasts sharply with the sequence that Betty Meggers and Clifford Evans had worked out for the Marajo area at the mouth of the Amazon (Meggers 1954). Their opposing hypothesis of population intrusions and slow degradation of complexity in a hostile environment did not fit the data from the Upper Amazon. Debate around the contrasting models of the preeminent Amazon Basin archaeologists created a stimulating intellectual environment. During his lifetime Lathrap proved that the tropical forest cultures had ancient beginnings. He also showed that tropical forest developments played a significant role in the culture history of South America. The earliest pottery and preceramic occupations have not yet been discovered in the Upper Amazon, but recent work by Anna Roosevelt demonstrates well that preceramic sites exist on the Lower Amazon, and some of the earliest pottery of the New World can be found in the Amazon Basin (Roosevelt et al. 1991).

Lathrap joined the Department of Anthropology at the University of Illinois Urban in 1959. There he taught many students and contributed greatly to the intellectual advancement of archaeology as a tool of culture history. His teaching method did not impose theories, but rather presented data (artifacts, dates, and sequences). Students were expected to build adequate models to account for the information. He supervised master's theses and Ph.D. dissertations for 27 students in a wide variety of fields. These focused on several geographic areas in both North and South America: midwestern United States, lowland Peru, highland Peru, coastal Peru, Ecuador, Brazil, Columbia, Venezuela, and the Caribbean. He also supervised dissertations related to physical anthropology and ethnobotany. For a complete list of these theses and dissertations see Oliver 1992:344–345.

Cultural similarities that Lathrap recognized between Kotosh Waira-jirca (of the Huanuco Basin, Peru), Late Tutishcainyo (an early ceramic phase from the Upper Amazon), and Valdivia (of Ecuador) led Lathrap to carry out research (published in 1971 in *Dumbarton Oaks Conference on Chavín*) at Real Alto, a Valdivia site in Ecuador. Work at Real Alto (Lathrap et al. 1977) proved that cultures dependent on flood plain agriculture were present at an early date in the coastal tropics. Furthermore he proved that Ecuador was closely tied to the tropical forest cultures of the Amazon Basin and that the earliest pottery-producing cultures were based on a tropical forest adaptation.

Another area that evolved from Lathrap's research in the tropics was his work on Chavín iconography. Lathrap was most impressed by the work of Julio C. Tello who believed that the Early Chavín culture evolved with tropical forest influence. Lathrap studied the caiman representations on the Tello Obelisk and showed that the representations were portraying a theme common to the tropical forest cultures. Many of the plants and animals represented were originally from the tropics. His work elaborated an understanding of the root cosmology that dominated indigenous intellectual and religious thought throughout the Americas.

Donald Lathrap was especially ingenious at reworking data to derive alternative explanations. He will be remembered for his innovative thinking and his ability to speak out at public symposia (often aggressively) to create a counterpoint to other ideas. Lathrap's lively, sometimes cantankerous input at meetings and seminars will be missed by all. For a complete review of the career of Donald W. Lathrap, see Oliver:283–345.

RONALD L. WEBER

Acknowledgments. The photograph is of Donald W. Lathrap in 1984 examining the Colombian collections at the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago. Photograph by Diane A. White (neg. no. 6N83710.2a).

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