



Pioneers in Maya Archaeology:

Alfred M. Tozzer: (1877–1954)

Submitted by Keith Merwin

Dr. Tozzer in 1943.



Alfred Marston Tozzer taught Anthropology at Harvard University from 1904 until his retirement in 1948. Many of his students entered the Maya field based on his enthusiasm. A well-known 1940 collection of essays *The Maya and Their Neighbors* had five editors and 34 contributors, mostly his past students, and is dedicated to Tozzer.

Alfred Tozzer was born in Lynn, Massachusetts on July 4, 1877. He received degrees in anthropology from Harvard College: an A.B. in 1900, an A.M. in 1901 and a Ph.D. in 1904. Tozzer traveled to Arizona, California and New Mexico to conduct his initial anthropological field work during his undergraduate summers in 1900 and 1901 studying linguistics among the Wintun and Navajo nations.

Between 1902 and 1905, Tozzer held the American Fellowship of the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA). Tozzer, as Traveling Fellow for the AIA and under the sponsorship of Charles P. Bowditch through Harvard's Peabody Museum, spent three winters living with and studying the Lacandonnes of Mexico and Central America. This material was used for his Ph.D. Dissertation and in the publication *A Comparative Study of the Mayas and Lacandonnes* (1907). He spent one season with Edward Thompson working on the dredging of the Cenote of Sacrifice at Chichén Itzá.

Tozzer joined the faculty of Harvard University in 1904 as an instructor. In 1909, he requested a leave of absence to head a Peabody Museum expedition to Guatemala in order to complete the last report started by Teobert Maler who had resigned.

The expedition left in the fall to map the ruins of Tikal. Raymond Merwin joined him as his assistant on this trip which also studied Nakum and located the site of Holmul. Tozzer's publications on Tikal and Nakum published as Peabody Museum Memoirs in 1911 and 1913, respectfully, are noted for their comparative methods

and depictions of

hieroglyphic inscriptions

and architecture. Returning to teaching at Harvard he was promoted to Assistant Professor in 1912.

In the winter of 1914, Tozzer requested another leave of absence so he could serve as the Director of the International School of Archaeology in Mexico City, and as a result, was in Vera Cruz during the U.S. naval bombardment and its six-month occupation by the United States Marine Corps. He joined the U.S. Military in World War I then returned to Harvard as an Associate Professor. The publication of his *A Grammar of the Maya Language, with Bibliography and Appraisal of the Works Noted* in 1921 covers the Yucatec Maya and was based on his field work while living among the Maya. While dated, the publication is still in print and referenced today.

Promoted to Professor of Anthropology in 1921, Tozzer continued to teach and serve in positions at Harvard, Radcliffe and with organizations such as the National Research Council and American Anthropological Association.

The Peabody Museum chose Tozzer as its second librarian in 1935 a post he held until 1947. For many years Tozzer worked on a translation and annotation of Bishop Diego de Landa's *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*. Tozzer's work includes not only an English translation of Landa's manuscript but over eleven hundred notes and comments, four additional appendices taken from contemporary sources and a syllabus and bibliography.

With the start of World War II, Tozzer returned to the military service, one of his assignments was as the director of the Honolulu Office of Strategic Services that was supervising radio broadcasts in eastern Asia. The end of the war brought him back to Harvard and then in 1946, the position of John E. Hudson Professor of Archaeology. In July of 1948 he was named



Dr. Tozzer visits a chicle (gum) camp in 1910.

Professor Emeritus. He continued to work and publish in Maya studies until his death. Tozzer's final work was *Chichén Itzá and Its Cenote of Sacrifice: A Comparative Study of Contemporaneous Maya and Toltec*, a Peabody Memoir published posthumously in 1957.

More than fifty years after his first expedition, Alfred Marston Tozzer passed away on October 5, 1954.

In 1974, the Peabody Museum library moved to a new building and was renamed the Tozzer Library as a tribute to the collections Alfred Marston Tozzer established (Mesoamerican), and his enormous contribution to both Harvard and the field of anthropology.

Sources: "Alfred Marston Tozzer" by S.K. Lothrop, *American Antropologist*, 57:614-618, 1955; *Alfred Marston Tozzer* by Herbert Joseph Spinden, National Academy of Science, 1957; *Tozzer, Alfred Marston (1877-1954), Paper 1900-1980: A Finding Aid*, Peabody Museum Archives, Harvard University.