IN MEMORIAM

EDWIN M. SHOOK

1911–2000

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A legendary figure in Maya archaeology, Edwin M. Shook, passed away at his home in Antigua, Guatemala, on March 9, 2000. Ed was one of the most prodigiously active figures in Mesoamerican archaeology during the twentieth century and may well have worked at more archaeological sites than any other Mesoamerican scholar.

Ed was born on November 22, 1911, in Newton, North Carolina. He spent most of his formative years in Virginia and Philadelphia. After a construction-site accident ended his dreams of becoming a professional baseball player, Ed planned a career in engineering. He indeed embarked on college studies in that field, first in New York and then in Washington, D.C. On a fateful evening in 1932, however, Rogers Johnson of the Carnegie Institute of Washington (CIW) mistakenly entered the class on the stresses of structural steel, seeking a draftsman. Ed turned serendipity to advantage and the next day had a job drafting in the legendary Division of Historical Research of the CIW. Ed began drafting plans for Oliver Ricketson’s Uaxactun project and subsequently drew maps for Sylvanus Morley’s *Inscriptions of the Peten* (Morley 1938). Ed’s responsibilities soon expanded, and he become a field archaeologist, making his first trip to Central America in 1934 to work at Uaxactun with Ledyard Smith. Ed continued with the CIW until the Division of Historical Research was disbanded formally in 1958. During those years, Ed worked at scores of sites in the Yucatan, Guatemala, and lower Central America.

The breadth of Ed’s fieldwork in the Maya region is unlikely ever to be matched. From Yucatan to the southern coast of Guatemala, Ed worked in an unparalleled number of Preclassic to Postclassic sites. Shook was a pioneer in research on the Guatemalan highlands and the Pacific Coast, and his work there remains vital today. Ed’s labors at Kaminaljuyu were essential in documenting that major Maya city and preserving its legacy before it was swamped by the expansion of Guatemala City. Two major volumes on Kaminaljuyu came out of this work: *Excavations at Kaminaljuyu* (Kidder et al. 1946) and *Mound E-III-3, Kaminaljuyu,*
Guatemala (Shook and Kidder 1952). Many smaller reports on Kaminaljuyu, the Guatemalan highlands, and the Pacific Coast appeared in the CIW Year Book series (Shook 1947, 1948, 1949a, 1950). Ed’s trailblazing survey of the Pacific Coast laid the groundwork for all work that has followed (Shook 1965). The early studies that Ed conducted at Pacific coast sites such as Monte Alto, Sin Cabezas, and Finca Arizona were vital in establishing temporal and cultural relationships within the coast and with other regions of Mesoamerica (Shook 1945, 1949b, 1965; Shook and Hatch 1978).

In 1955, following the final CIW field project at Mayapan, Shook accepted a position with the University of Pennsylvania as director of the Tikal Project. For nine years Ed led what was, to that time, the largest archaeological project in the New World. The Tikal project was a landmark in Mesoamerican studies and in many respects began the modern era of Maya field studies. In addition to the fantastic discoveries made at Tikal, Ed helped to train a generation of Maya archaeologists.

Following Tikal, Ed went on to work in Costa Rica before eventually returning to Guatemala in 1968 to direct the Monte Alto Project on the Pacific Coast. In the 1970s and 1980s, Ed continued his work on the Pacific Coast and Guatemalan highlands, producing important works on Formative-period sites such as La Blanca and Salinas la Blanca on the coast and Semetebaj in the highlands (Shook and Hatch 1979; Shook et al. 1979). Ed was still writing in 1999 when he was stricken with pneumonia. Among his final publications was an article on Kaminaljuyu and the Guatemalan highlands, written with Marion Popeno de Hatch, in the Historia General de Guatemala (Shook and Hatch 1999).

In addition to his scholarly activities, Ed was justifiably proud of the contributions he made to his adopted country, Guatemala. He was instrumental in the establishment of Guatemala’s first national park, at Tikal. Ed was also a principal in the founding of the American School in Guatemala. In acknowledgment of his many accomplishments and contributions, he was awarded the Order of the Quetzal by the Guatemalan government in 1963. In 1964, he was named Professor Emeritus by the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, and in 1989 he was made Doctor Honoris Causa by the Universidad del Valle de Guatemala.

Ed’s wife of 54 years, Virginia Barr Shook, died in 1990. He is survived by three sons: Edwin M. Shook, Jr., of Worcester, Massachusetts; Stephen H. Shook of Antigua, Guatemala; and John A. Shook of Chocowinity, North Carolina, along with six grandchildren.

Before his death, Ed Shook requested that anyone wishing to make a memorial donation do so to the Virginia B. Shook Library of the Universidad del Valle de Guatemala, c/o the U.S. Foundation of the Valley of Guatemala, Kirby and Hornbuckle, CPA, PC, 214 College Avenue, Elmiria, NY 14901, USA.

REFERENCES

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