Andean Past

Volume 8 Article 4

2007

Gordon Randolph Willey (March 17, 1913 - April 28, 2002)

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Gordon Willey, Virú Valley, 1946 (photograph © 2006 Harvard University, Peabody Museum, 2004.24.27839).

The passing of Gordon R. Willey marks the waning of a pioneering era in American archaeology dominated by the discipline's 20th century founding figures. Many are warmly remembered in Willey's (1988) retrospective, *Portraits in American Archaeology*, and many were graciously entertained by Katharine Winston Whaley, Gordon's devoted wife of 63 years. She departed life less than 12 months before her husband expired at home while convalescing after heart surgery. American archaeology has lost a very genial couple, a far ranging field investigator, a masterful synthesizer, and a splendid professorial mentor. In paying homage to my former teacher and senior Harvard colleague, I review Willey's contributions to Andean studies and recount some of his rich remembrances about doing research in Peru. He greatly enjoyed his formative years in the Andes and they helped structure a marvelous career that came to embrace all of New World archaeology.

Willey was born in Chariton, Iowa. His family moved to California in 1925 and he attended high school in Long Beach. Willey enrolled at the University of Arizona where he studied anthropology and also received a medal in track. This small bronze award sat proudly atop Gordon's office desk and he long maintained an enviable level of

ANDEAN PAST 8 (2007): 1-7.

fitness through regular exercise. After receiving his B.A. in 1935, Willey continued at Arizona under Byron Cummings, the early dean of southwestern archaeology, and received his M.A. in 1936. He then worked in the Southeast under the Works Progress Administration and frequently collaborated with James Ford, an enduring friend and colleague. Together they demonstrated an early penchant for regional synthesis (Ford and Willey 1941) that later became a characteristic of Willey's career.

As a fledgling archaeologist Willey had no intention of pursuing Latin American studies. However, the year Gordon received his M.A., the energetic Peruvian scholar, Julio C. Tello, convened a scholarly meeting at the American Museum of Natural History in New York to promote Andean research. The gathering included Tello's old comrade, Samuel K. Lothrop, as well as Julio's 1926 field collaborator, Alfred L. Kroeber. With a young Wendell C. Bennett serving as secretary, the convocation created the Institute of Andean Research (IAR) to further Latin American field studies.

In 1941, the Institute received federal subsidies to expand its activities. Several new members were recruited to conduct far-flung projects. These archaeologists included Junius B. Bird, Alfred Kidder II, and Kroeber's former student, William Duncan Strong, who taught at Colombia University, where Willey had enrolled for Ph.D. studies. Willey, accompanied by his wife Katherine, sailed for Peru in June 1941 on the same ship as Junius and Peggy Bird, who were bound for Chile. Willey completed his doctorate in 1942, writing his dissertation on the Chancay Valley (Willey 1943).

In Lima the Willeys and Birds met up with Strong, who had arrived earlier. Tello frequently accompanied the men as they visited a number of central coast sites, including settlements previously located by Max Uhle. All parties were interested in finding archaeological deposits that would yield stratified cultural successions, but their excavation procedures differed markedly. Precocious for the times, Bird dug by tightly controlled natural depositional units, whereas Tello was a far less meticulous field recorder, but a masterful observer of stratigraphy. Strong, in turn, sought to systematize data recovery and recording by excavating in measured horizontal levels or artificial stratigraphic units. Willey adopted his mentor's procedures and pursued them throughout his career.

At Tello's invitation, Strong initiated his IAR project at Pachacamac, where John M. Corbett, a University of Southern California archaeology student, joined the team. Pachacamac is an expansive monumental regional religious center with numerous platform mound complexes. Prior excavation of mortuary remains by Max Uhle (1903) had revealed a four-fold sequence of Inca and pre-Inca burials. Seeking to tap the site's chronological potential, Strong excavated the steeply inclined sides of the dominant mound, the Temple of the Sun. Although his horizontal excavation levels did not align with the sloping natural levels, a generalized succession of pottery types was detectable (Strong and Corbett 1943). At the time there was no interest in studying food remains that were both abundant and well preserved due to the hyper-arid environment. Encountering plentiful plant debris and copious peanut shells for the first time in his career, the profuse remains amazed Gordon. Indeed, he later remarked that the Pachacamac debris ". . . looked like the sweepings from Yankee Stadium after a double header!" In subsequent years Willey was always attentive to studies of biological remains, although they were never a primary focus of his own research.

After Strong's departure, Gordon and John stayed into 1942 and dug at a series of sites north of Lima. For his dissertation, *Excavations in the Chancay Valley*, Willey (1943) published his results from two Early Intermediate Period settlements. The two young archaeologists were also eager to investigate earlier occupations. Their quest was stimulated by Tello's (1929) stunning discoveries at Chavín de Huantar, the Paracas Peninsula, and also by Uhle's (1906) identification of ancient coastal shell middens. Willey and Corbett dug at Ancón Bay, an area previously

explored by Uhle and renowned for its vast necropolis. They also worked at sites around Puerto Supe. The latter included investigations of the preceramic maritime mound complex of Aspero. Gordon and John mistook this site for an anomalous ceramic stage settlement, as Uhle had earlier. This was the working assumption at the time because there was simply no awareness that non-agricultural people could pursue a sedentary existence, or erect sizable architectural works. The preceramic was better understood three decades later when Willey revisited Aspero. He immediately recognized what the complex was and instigated its published reappraisal (Moseley and Willey 1973). As Aspero illustrates, Gordon's willingness to change his mind in light of new information was an enduring scholarly virtue.

In 1942 the two investigators readily identified early ceramic remains in their additional explorations around Supe and at Ancón. Tello had long championed the hypothesis that Peruvian civilizations arose out of a far-flung archaic cultural matrix expressed at Chavín (Burger in press), and the excavations by Willey and Corbett (1954) confirmed the relative antiquity and broad coastal distribution of Chavín-like materials. Yet, in their discussions of these materials and early Andean civilization in general, Willey and Tello arrived at very different conclusions. In their conversations Gordon reported that Julio always viewed the development of Chavín and subsequent societies as a highly intertwined evolutionary process with basal roots and cultural trunks that diverged in branches and then often converged back together (Burger in press) Seemingly appropriate for the ethnically diverse Cordillera, I always thought Tello's vision sounded remarkably similar to Kroeber's evolutionary "tree of culture" (1948:260) with dividing stalks and converging stems.

Yet, Gordon told me that he and his North American associates, including Kroeber himself, found Tello's perspective unsatisfactory. Instead, they subscribed to Max Uhle's interpretative framework of expansive cultural horizons alternating with episodes of local development. Working at a number of far-flung coastal locations, Uhle had found Inca remains immediately preceded by variable local cultures that were, in turn, preceded by remains he attributed to Tiwanaku. Using Cusco as an ethnohistoric analogy, Uhle proposed that Inca and Tiwanaku remains constituted sweeping archaeological horizons that originated at their respective capitals and then spread over vast areas of locally evolved societies. During the process of analyzing and publishing Uhle's collections at Berkeley, Kroeber and his students, including Strong, codified the interpretative framework. Consequently, Willey used it both to analyze the Ancón and Supe collections and to propose that Chavín constituted a horizon style. He argued that the style should be strictly defined by the carved stone art and iconography at the type-site and origin center of Chavín de Huantar (Willey 1945, 1948, 1951). Thereafter, he strongly advocated the use of horizon styles for organizing and interpreting archaeological successions elsewhere in the Americas (Willey and Phillips 1958).

Whereas Inca authority was spread by force of arms, Chavín influence diffused by ideological means. Recognizing that the horizon concept subsumed great variation, Gordon convened and chaired a 1955 seminar to develop "An Archaeological Classification of Culture Contact Situations" (Willey *et al.* 1956). The six-member panel of distinguished archaeologists included John H. Rowe and Donald Lathrap, who served as recorder and editor. Their intent was to formulate a classification that would systematize comparisons of contact cases, thereby facilitating anthropological generalization about cultural interaction.

Evidence of contact was defined archaeologically by the incursion of elements of one culture into the area of another. An important distinction was made between two categories of intrusive phenomena: "site units" and "trait units". The former entailed intrusive physical occupations by foreign groups, while the latter included incursions of alien objects, styles, technologies or complex associations. A four-fold classification for each type of unit was based on the outcome of contact.

With his doctorate in hand following his first Peruvian field work, from 1943 to 1950 Gordon was employed as an anthropologist by the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE). He returned to work in the U.S. Southeast, but remained active in South American studies thanks to Julian Steward, his Institute superior. The study of cultural evolution had languished by that time and Steward was keenly interest in reviving and refining this line of inquiry. He brought these interests to his editorship of the *Handbook of South American Indians* for the BAE and assigned Willey (1946a; 1946b) the task of producing archaeological syntheses for areas such as the Pampas. The task honed an enduring interest in formulating regional overviews of cultural development (*e.g.* Willey and Howard 1948). It also provided firm foundations for Willey's (1966, 1971) later grand syntheses of the entire hemisphere. This singular overview by an individual scholar with first-hand field experience in North, Middle, and South America remains unparalleled. Today, studies of comparable breadth are edited volumes generally undertaken by a cadre of informed investigators.

At the conclusion of World War II, Steward actively furthered joint planning with Willey and Bennett to conduct a multi-disciplinary investigation of a single Peruvian desert drainage, the Virú Valley. Smithsonian geographer Webster McBride and ethnologist Alan Holmberg joined the project, as did a group of distinguished Andean prehistorians including Junius Bird, Donald Collier, Duncan Strong, and two of his graduate students, Clifford Evans and James Ford. Most of the archaeologists undertook excavations aimed at elucidating the different cultures within the study area. However, Steward's evolutionary interests led him to encourage Willey to examine the spatial and temporal distributions of Virú sites. Consequently, Gordon joined his old friend Jim Ford in an archaeological survey of the valley (Ford and Willey 1949).

Given the task of dating sites on the basis of surface shards, Ford employed the familiar methods of collecting, typing, and seriating that he had formulated earlier in the Southeast. The goal of recording and analyzing all prehistoric sites left Willey's survey responsibilities with fewer precedents to draw upon. Mapping, classifying, and recording distributions of North American mounds and earth works had early antecedents in studies by Caleb Atwater as well as Ephraim George Squier and Edwin Hamilton Davis (Squier and Davis 1848). However, the great majority of Virú Valley sites were not monumental facilities. Rather, they were settings in which common folk worked, lived, and died. Lacking notable art and architecture these unimposing, yet abundant, remains traditionally lay beyond the purview of archaeological inquiry.

Inadvertently, World War II assisted bringing them literally into view. Fearing a possible invasion of South America, the United States sponsored the systematic aerial photographic documentation of all the coastal regions of the southern hemisphere, as well as important interior areas. Willey, as well as Paul Kosok (1965), were among the first to apply this developing resource to Peruvian archaeology. Gordon and Jim Ford relied on air photos to locate their survey targets, to map those with architectural remains, and finally to plot valley-wide settlement distributions.

Aerial imagery does not reveal the presence of all ancient sites even in the driest of deserts. Nonetheless, the survey showed a revolutionary cornucopia of folk settlement and provided a holistic database for investigating the past and monitoring change. This made Willey's (1953) seminal report, *Prehistoric Settlement Patterns in the Viru Valley, Peru,* a milestone in New World archaeology that indicated the way for numerous subsequent studies of a similar nature. The report is also the default synthesis of the larger Virú Project. Gordon told me plans to publish a final integrative overview came to naught because several senior participants could not agree upon who would author it. Although the Virú undertaking set precedents for multi-disciplinary projects elsewhere, they were slow to take hold in Peru. None of the participating archaeologists continued field studies in the region and the

dominant focus of U.S. instigated research shifted to chronological refinement and the seriation of mortuary lots.

Among many interests, Willey had an abiding concern with method and theory. With an eye to possibly codifying New World procedures, he and Phillip Phillips (1958) addressed the topic in a provocative book that stimulated wide professional debate. The volume discusses archaeological horizons and traditions, and many of the other concepts that Willey first encountered in Peru and thought applicable elsewhere. Gordon and I once team-taught a method and theory course. His most poignant observation on the topic was a side remark he made to me after class. "Method and theory is similar to an amoeba", he said. "You tentatively extend a pseudopodium in a new direction. Then either retract it encountering resistance or push it further along the new path if unhindered!" This rather eclectic philosophy allowed Gordon to venture forth on various fronts and appreciate the many changes in method and theory witnessed over his long and fruitful career.

Following Virú, Willey's next field-project was in Panama. He said his plan at the time was to gradually work his way north from the Andes, through the Intermediate Area, and then into Mesoamerica. However this expansive research agenda was curtailed when he became Harvard's first Charles P. Bowditch Professor of Central American and Mexican Archaeology and Ethnology in 1950. He returned to the Andes for fieldwork only once, in 1971 when he visited the site of Aspero with me (Moseley and Willey 1973; Willey 1989:107). He remained affiliated to Harvard, and active in Maya research for the rest of his life.

Willey was greatly honored over the course of his long life. He was elected to membership in the American Philosophical Society, the National Academy of Sciences, and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and was a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy. He was a President of both the American Anthropological Association (1960-1962) and the Society for American Archaeology (1967-68). A session of the 2003 Society for American Archaeology meeting entitled "Gordon R. Willey's Contribution to American Archaeology: Contemporary Perspectives" was organized in his memory by Jeremy A. Sabloff and William L. Fash.

Among his many awards are the Kidder Award for Eminence in the Field of American Archaeology from the American Anthropological Association, the Viking Medal from the Viking Fund, the Distinguished Service Award from the Society for American Archaeology, the Walker Prize from the Boston Museum of Science, the Lucy Wharton Drexel Medal for Archaeology from the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania, the Huxley Memorial Medal from the Royal Anthropological Institute, the Gold Medal from the Society of Antiquaries of London, and the Order of the Quetzal from the Government of Guatemala. He held honorary doctorates from the University of Arizona, the University of New Mexico, and the University of Cambridge where he was a visiting lecturer in 1962-63 and an overseas fellow at Churchill College in 1968-69 (Vogt 2004:409-410). In 1988 a festschrift was published in his honor (Vogt and Leventhal 1988).

In addition to producing many highly regarded scientific works, Gordon Willey was a successful writer of fiction. He was President of Boston's Tavern Club from 1973 to 1975 and penned many successful plays for that organization. His archaeological mystery novel, *Selena*, (Willey 1993) has been published in several editions.

As a professor, Willey regularly offered seminars on South and Middle American archaeology. Always attracting good students, he set challenging standards for thorough research and original insight and led by way of example. Gordon encouraged and supported graduate students who wished to work in South American and produced a cadre of distinguished archaeologists. During his long and fertile career he profoundly enriched American archaeology. His wisdom, insight and guidance will be sorely missed.

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