

# ALFRED MAUDSLAY'S CAUSALITY DILEMMA

ARCHAEOLOGY, PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE INFLUENCE OF  
NINETEENTH-CENTURY TRAVEL LITERATURE



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Royal Anthropological Institute

***Anthropology & Photography No. 12***

ISSN 2397-1754

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First published 2019

*Cover image: Stela D, Quirigua, 1883. Photographer: A. Maudslay. 1998.182.9. Courtesy Pitt Rivers Museum.*

ISSN 2397-1754

ISBN 978-0-900632-54-9

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*The city was desolate. No remnant of this race hangs around the ruins... One thing I believe, that its history is graven on its monuments. No Champollion has yet brought to them the energies of his inquiring mind. Who shall read them?*  
(Stephens 1841:160)

This passage was published in the seminal *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (1841) by John Lloyd Stephens and Frederick Catherwood.

Stephens' imploring prose could be interpreted as the foundation for a core tenet of Mayan archaeology that continues on well into the 1970s: the importance of decipherment of Mayan glyphs. Without an understanding of the glyphic language used on the monuments of Central America, a comprehensive history of the Mayan civilization would be impossible – yet unlike Champollion's deciphering of the Egyptian hieroglyphics, no single Rosetta stone breakthrough would be found. The decipherment of the Mayan secret would be done piece-by-piece, and glyph-by-glyph, over a period of many decades. However, it would be this call to arms that would influence a generation of archaeologists to search for these 'lost' ruins, and to make their own mark on them, in hope of the prestige of being the 'Champollion' of Meso-American history.

*Incidents* was one of the most popular travel narratives, as well as one of the best-selling books, of the nineteenth century on both sides of the Atlantic. It was an almost ubiquitous presence in the bibliographies of the contemporary scholars researching the Maya, a presence that continues even today. It formed the basis of numerous explorations of Central American sites and was a foundational study of Meso-American archaeology. Yet *Incidents* was a travel narrative primarily describing the adventures

of John Lloyd Stephens' exploration of Central America,<sup>1</sup> accompanied by illustrator Frederick Catherwood, and was aimed at popular culture rather than at any serious archaeological or scientific readership.

What was it about this book that made it a catalyst for Meso-American archaeology? Was it simply the powerfully romanticized narrative of exploration that appealed to young, wealthy men in search of adventure? Or is there something more didactically or epistemologically tangible about the book that drew a growing generation of archaeologists to it?

One key aspect of *Incidents* that aided its eventual influence was that it was filled with dramatic and romantic illustrations of the exotic 'other', of lands unseen by Western eyes since the Spanish invasion of Cortes, and of sublime and bizarre symbolic monuments of a lost civilization. Details of archaeological data were drawn through the lens of the camera lucida, rendering them in, as yet, unparalleled detail: so thorough that Stephens', at least, thought the glyphs, and hence the entire Mayan language, could be deciphered from them. Yet it would take another century of study before the secrets of the code were revealed in full.<sup>2</sup> These images did however play an important role in inspiring the creation of a new branch of antiquarian interest, later developing into the full archaeological investigation of Central America.

This essay will suggest that it was specifically these visual representations that drew Alfred Maudslay, a colonial secretary and would-be tobacco farmer, away from the South Pacific colonial office and the Jamaican tobacco

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1 *Incidents* was also implicitly aimed towards the promotion of American economic domination in the, then hotly contested, Central American region (Cabañas 2006).

2 For a thorough examination of the history of the efforts to decipher Maya glyphs, see Coe 2012.

plantations, into the jungles of Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras, and only later, after his first trips of 1881 and 1882, into the world of academic Meso-American scholarship.<sup>3</sup> It will also suggest that it was not an overriding interest in the archaeology per se, or an ambition to achieve success in archaeology as a subject, that drew Maudslay to Mayan sites such as Palenque or Copan, but an ambition to document, preserve and catalogue the ruins through photography.

My reanalysis here of Maudslay's early photography does not aim to relocate his contemporary position as a noted and highly regarded Meso-American archaeologist to a purely photographic role, nor does it suggest that Maudslay's contributions to the archaeological study of the Maya were anything other than groundbreaking. However, it repositions the photograph as the *raison d'être* of Maudslay's pioneering study, through which we can reassess the role of visual imagery in the archaeology of Central America. In correcting the view of Maudslay's ground-breaking work towards a more visual beginning, this essay presents the connections between nineteenth-century literature and the progression of archaeological photography as one of the primary strands of

archaeology's methodological development.<sup>4</sup> By suggesting that Victorian traditions of visual imagery were the inspiration for Maudslay's initial fieldwork, it raises the photographs to a primary and essential role within his initial studies, and places them within a context that enables us to gain a better understanding of the fluidity between traditionally separated cultural discourses. This is in contrast to the usual historiographical understanding of his photographic work as a by-product of his already piqued interest in Maya antiquities, which also overlooks its culturally symbolic role in the professionalization of the archaeological discipline.

### **Maudslay the photographer**

The largest collection of Maudslay's photographs is now in the British Museum collection. Numbering over 800 negatives and many hundreds of prints, slides and written documents, the collection was given to the museum on

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3 A wider biography of Alfred Maudslay would be far beyond the scope of this work, and has already been completed by Dr Ian Graham in his excellent work of research and authorship *Alfred Maudslay and the Maya* (Graham 2002), from which much of the biographical detail here has been sourced.

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4 Both Stephens and Maudslay's work were conducted at a time of great change within the discipline of archaeology. Archaeology's development from a history of antiquarianism towards a fully self-contained academic subject spanned over almost the entire nineteenth century, and it cannot be described as an independent academic discipline until the very end of the century. Although the use of the modern terminology for the subject and study of the human past remained fluid during Maudslay's lifetime, the broader term 'archaeology', with its generalized meaning and structure, was in place – evidenced by Maudslay's use of the term in his section's title of *Biologia Centrali Americana* (BCA) – and would have been understood during the period of Maudslay's studies in the 1880s and 90s. For a full history of the complex development of professional archaeology, see Trigger 1989.

Maudslay's death in 1931.<sup>5</sup> The British Museum's Maudslay collection today, on first inspection, appears to contain only photographs taken during the period of his archaeological work, after 1881.<sup>6</sup> It is therefore easy to assume that, as the Maudslay photographs were created during and after his archaeological fieldwork, they are therefore a product of it.

In fact, Maudslay had been a prolific photographer prior to his first trip to Mayan sites in 1881. In 1875 Lady Gordon, wife of Sir Arthur Gordon, Maudslay's superior during his appointment as colonial secretary in Fiji, wrote: 'He is a good photographer and is bringing out a large camera.' (Graham 2002:40).<sup>7</sup> This 'large camera' would likely have been a wet-plate collodion one, which would have required a detailed knowledge of the photochemical method in order to create and process images. It is also possible that it was a dry-plate camera, as that process was invented in 1871 and became widely commercially available

in 1879. Although there is no material evidence to support Maudslay's adoption of the dry-plate process in the 1870s,<sup>8</sup> if he had, that would also indicate his passion for photography, in his very early adoption of a new, and expensive, technology. He is also attributed as taking a lantern-slide projector (Graham 2002:40), further indicating his proficiency and interest in photography at this time. These processes are not easy to master, and require many years of practice and a high level of skill and knowledge to complete successfully in the field, particularly in the challenging conditions of the tropics where environmental factors including temperature and air humidity would have been critical issues in the successful creation of imagery.

The fact that few of Maudslay's early photographs have been found promotes the idea that his photographs are representations of archaeology alone, and therefore a product of the growing use of photography in archaeological surveys of the late nineteenth century. Small numbers exist of photographs taken by Maudslay that do not relate to archaeology. Three such prints are in Hereford Public Library and are also in the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) archive. These were taken in Alberta Canada, and Ian Graham strongly attributes them to a journey to Canada made in 1880. They have no archaeological merit and can be ascribed as more aesthetic contemplations than as scientific, or even holiday snapshot, images (Graham 2002:76, 289n2). Eight more prints in the RGS archive of Alberta, showing the same printing technique and materials, clearly show an attempt at artistry, these however are marked 1901, though this is a

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5 Other collections of Maudslay's photographs are held by many archaeological departments and museums around the world. They were widely disseminated, often by Maudslay himself, for the attention and study of other Meso-American scholars and for exhibition. These collections are almost entirely made up of prints and include: the Peabody Museum, Brooklyn Museum, Pitt Rivers Museum, V+A, Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Royal Anthropological Institute archives and Royal Geographical Society collection, as well as reprints and unattributed photographs yet to be found in museums and libraries across the world.

6 Assignment of date to many of the photographs is near impossible. The images of archaeology can, however, often be attributed to certain trips, though a number of miscellaneous images, appearing alongside the archaeological work, are often undateable.

7 Although only one print, taken in Tonga, has been attributed to Maudslay c.1877 (Graham 2002:plate19), in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge, their South Pacific collection of images from the mid 1870s may very well be made up of images he took, though no accurate attribution is currently possible.

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8 Once the process had been invented and the dry-plate Eastman plates had become widely circulated around 1879, Maudslay would likely have adopted the process for its improved ease of use and portability.

date that cannot be confirmed nor denied with any certainty.<sup>9</sup>

Maudslay's increasing enthusiasm is further illustrated by a material analysis of the core Maudslay collection in the British Museum, where large numbers of unpublished and non-archaeological materials are present. These images, often portraits of family members, friends, workers and landscapes, appear within the museum's archaeological collections, usually categorized under 'miscellaneous', and are an indication of Maudslay's photographic imagination – that his interest in photography went beyond its use as a tool in the name of archaeology and suggests that he was not an archaeologist taking photographs but a photographer turning to archaeology, inspired by the visualizations first seen in *Incidents*.

Non-archaeological photographs of Central America taken after 1895 also appear in the British Museum collection, although these were probably taken as an accompaniment to his 1899 travel narrative, *Glimpse of Guatemala*, and a number of them appear in its pages alongside his photographs taken between 1881 and 1895. Images of Egypt and the Nile also appear within the Maudslay collection. Taken shortly after his wife's death in 1926, the images, mainly of boats cruising the Nile, are clearly within an artistic framework (Maudslay collection, British Museum). These images have been spread out across the collection, and largely remaining uncatalogued, or are identified as being of interest to anthropology rather than archaeology.

It is also likely that there were many more of these non-archaeological photographs that failed to pass into the British Museum collection on Maudslay's death. Maudslay's will states that his 'collection of photographs of archaeological interest' was to pass to the museum. This excludes all personal photographs, and those that have entered the collection seem to have done so by accident, and are separated early in their archival life away from the specifically archaeological.

Furthermore, on his outward-bound journey of 1883, Maudslay describes his occupation to the ships manifest as that of an 'artist' rather than as an 'archaeologist' or even a traveller or tourist.<sup>10</sup> We can therefore begin to speculate that his intentions during this early period of his fieldwork were less focused towards archaeological survey work and were more those of a photographer with a history of antiquarian and ethnographic collecting attempting to continue this collection practice using the camera.

Whilst Maudslay's occupation at this time, after his employment within the colonial office but before his engagement entirely as an archaeologist, can be described as fluid, his self-recognition as someone engaged with visual matters is indicative of his primary focus in these early excavations. It is also indicative of the immaturity of the professionalization of the archaeological discipline, despite Maudslay having already published and presented archaeological findings at the Royal Geographical Society in December of 1882 (Graham 2002:102),

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9 The Banff, Alberta images in the RGS collection are also marked 1901, indicating either a misdating of all these images taken in Alberta or an error in Ian Graham's, otherwise consistently accurate, research. RGS-IBG Collections archives, numbers: 061859–60, 0620250–062033.

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10 New Orleans Passenger Lists 1813–1945, 25 June 1883, National Archives. Accessed through ancestry.com (8 Jan 2015).





Figure 1 Stella D, Quirigua, 1883. Photographer: A. Maudslay, 1998.182.10. Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

he remained outside of the academic framework then being developed.<sup>11</sup>

The key date in Maudslay's development as an archaeologist is 1881. This was the year he began his fourteen-year long fieldwork. Maudslay's aim was to document the ruins in order to preserve them for posterity. In his 1888 introduction to the publication of his work in the seminal *Biologia Centrali Americana* (BCA)<sup>12</sup> he states: 'The plan of operations as far as possible in America was first to establish the geographical positions of a group of ruins and make a survey of the site, then to take careful measurements of the buildings and to photograph such as were sufficiently well preserved.' (Maudslay 1889–1902:2)

It was only in 1882, towards the end of this second trip, that he learned the plaster-casting techniques from Desire Charnay.

This goes some way towards confirming that his first two trips of 1881 and 1882 were initially motivated by the idea of preserving the monuments through photography rather than any other mimetic technology such as the use of plaster casts – which today are hailed as archaeologically vibrant and valuable data, and the most important product of his surveys. Maudslay himself even excludes his first trip to Tikal in 1881 in his preface to *BCA*, stating:

*My first journey through the Central American forests in search of the ruins of ancient Indian towns, during the winter of 1882–83, was merely a journey of curiosity and I had no intention whatever of making a study of American archaeology.*

(Maudslay 1889–1902:iii)

Whether this was a simple dating error, or a considered thought that Maudslay's activity of 1881 was as a traveller or tourist with no academic interest, the fact that images of Tikal made in 1881 (date indicated by uncleared<sup>13</sup> nature of the site) survive in the collection further indicates Maudslay's reflection upon his early trips, despite their photographic successes, as outside of his academic, or archaeological, work.

### **Photography: an archaeological methodology or a visual tradition?**

Attempts to preserve historical entities through photography were popular results of photography's mimetic action, especially in the nineteenth century, when questions regarding the subjectivity of photography were largely posed outside of scientific and archaeological circles. As Edwards has noted with regard to the similar practices of amateur photographers of the British Survey movement, the act of attempting a systematic and complete recording of historical monuments forms 'part of rhetorical expression of a cohesive sense of purpose and attempts at institutional rigor.' (Edwards 2008:186).

In the practical world of nineteenth-century archaeology, especially during this moment of its professional development, the requirement to objective and precise recording of data became

<sup>11</sup> The academic teaching of the discipline of archaeology only began at the end of the nineteenth century, though the principles and aims of the discipline had gradually been defined and put into practice at many sites across the world prior to its introduction as a university subject (Trigger 1989:72–6).

<sup>12</sup> *BCA* – *Biologia Centrali Americana* was a subscription-based periodical published in parts between 1879 and 1915. On completion, it formed a densely illustrated encyclopaedia of Central American flora and fauna, much of it then new to science. Maudslay's contribution, *Biologia Centrali Americana: Archaeologia*, was the final volume of the series.

<sup>13</sup> Maudslay partially cleared the site in 1881, returning in 1882. Maudslay also visited Quirigua (and Copan) in 1881 however the images he took there were dramatically underexposed and do not survive. (Graham 2002:81–82).



Figure 2 Stela D, Quirigua, 1883. Photographer: A. Maudslay. 1998.182.22. Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

one of the key scientific foundations upon which the subject was built. This basis on the mimetic, and therefore seemingly objective and accurate, transcription of the real world allowed photography to become an active participant in the professionalization of archaeology as an academic and scientific subject. Furthermore, the desire for systematic cataloguing, preserving and documenting of the planet adhered to a very particular Victorian sensibility of understanding the world through an encyclopaedic collation of information, which often extended into a form of bureaucratic hedonism.

Yet this sensibility is one in which the exertion of epistemological clarity was in constant dialogue with a visual aesthetic that had formed the boundaries of contemporary understanding. These boundaries, erected by the previous participants' activities within the subject and in constant flux, formed the basis on to which the new record would be applied and were often non-mechanical drawings that aligned with the visual aesthetics of Victorian arts – due in no small part to the celebratory action of self-indulgent imperialism at home and abroad. This would be despite an institutional agenda giving rise to repeated and continual attempts at the elimination of artistic and aesthetic tendencies, and to stop their related subjectivity from creeping in to the recording process. For example, as Edwards notes, the exponents of the photographic survey repeatedly insisted on the straightforwardness of images through suppression of the aesthetic desires of the photographer (Edwards 2008:187). Maudslay, however, was self-funded and self-directed, with no institutional training nor agenda. He was also, like many of the Victorian age, part of a popular culture that thrived on tales of adventure in the distant and romantic reaches of the Empire.

The primary visual representation of Meso-American monuments, which therefore stands as the basis of knowledge to that date, had been Catherwood's illustrations in *Incidents* (1841). Maudslay writes in his 1888 introduction to *BCA*, 'Stephens and Catherwood were pioneers in this work [...] but the improvements made during the last fifty years in the processes of moulding and photography now make it possible to produce copies of Indian carvings even more exact than those traced by the skilful hand of Catherwood.' (Maudslay 1889–1902:3).

The contemporary photographs taken by Desire Charnay, Augustus and Alice le Plongeon, Edward Thompson and Teobert Maler had not been widely circulated by the time Maudslay made his first expedition in 1881. Charnay's first publication of imagery, *Cités et Ruines Américaines*, was in 1863, but had a limited distribution. Le Plongeon's first publication of imagery came in 1873 and was a dedicated manual regarding photographic technique. It was not until 1886 that they published their findings on Mayan archaeology specifically.<sup>14</sup> Thompson and Maler were both published after Maudslay's initial journeys. Thompson did not arrive in Yucatan until 1885 (Graham 2002:126), and Maler, with the Peabody expeditions, did not arrive until in 1894 and was not published until 1901 (*ibid.*:180 and 311).

There is a close visual alignment between Catherwood's drawings and Maudslay's photographs. Maudslay's photographs often recreate the exact composition and visual impact of Catherwood's illustrations. This visual similarity is often so close that they should be regarded as almost direct photographic

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14 Online Archive, Getty Research Institute, University of California. <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt3z09r80d/dsc/#ref323>

reproductions, as pastiches of Catherwood's romantic work and the scientific aim of objective visualization (compare Figures 3 and 4).

A pastiche can be defined as a work of visual representation that imitates one or more characteristics or styles of another artist's work. It generally celebrates rather than criticizes the imitated works. Rosalind Kraus writes: 'Pastiche as an artistic practise thus expresses the subjective experience of the intolerable narrowing of the scope for invention, due to the limitations inherent in an art's organizing structure.' (Kraus 1998:16). Maudslay's recreation of Catherwood's drawings can perhaps be thought about through Kraus's post-Freudian description, again concerning the relationship between the opposing technical processes of drawing and photography: pastiche can fall into a 'reaction formation' that combines a recognition and celebration of the original visualization, with a critique and rejection of it – often driven by an anxiety to take possession of that which is depicted (Kraus 1998:110–12). Whilst this analogy does not extend to the symptomatic fetish reaction formation that Freud suggests, Maudslay's reaction formation operates at a similar, if milder, psychological level. Entailing a complex intertwining of ego, anxiety and fetish, Freud's reaction formation is created through the repulsion and repression of hidden fetishes, which have a dialectical effect upon the patient, who then characterizes the opposite tendency: the often quoted example being anal fixation and obsessional hand washing (Kraus 1998:111). The reaction formation mentioned here is also composed of similar dialectical obsessions, but without the fetishization or extreme behavioural results Freud uses as examples.

The act of pastiche also, as previously mentioned, continues a tradition of visual communication that would be easily recognizable

to both academically interested scholars and lay readers. Recognizability was clearly an important factor in the dissemination of Maudslay's work. This is evidenced by his use of many of his most similar 'Catherwood' photographs in his display at the 1893 Chicago Colombian Exposition. These images, 30 × 24 inch carbon prints, created from the original negatives through a process camera enlarger, were chosen, not only for their appeal to aesthetic sensibilities or their finely crafted presence, but as immediately recognizable images that exemplify the presentational style of Mayan ruins to a global audience, an audience already attuned to this tradition through the publication of *Incidents*. The prints have little archaeological or epistemological significance, being largely either wide-angled landscape images of Mayan ruins or individual stela images, which, although extraordinarily detailed, could only illustrate a minimum of archaeological information. They were chosen, for the Guatemala pavilion, as images of aesthetic value for the prestige of the exposition display and the projection of the sublime power of their subject upon an audience with little non-Mediterranean archaeological experience outside the popular travel illustrations of Catherwood.

### **Pastiche – correcting the errors or self-propaganda?**

Maudslay's basing of his photographic composition on Catherwood's illustrations may, in part, have been the result of his uncertain, and amateur, position within institutional archaeology. Being a private citizen, self-funding and self-directing, Maudslay's anxiety regarding the objectivity of his results, as well as the reception of them, may have led him to base his images on previously accepted visual conventions already operating within the subject: the images of *Incidents*.

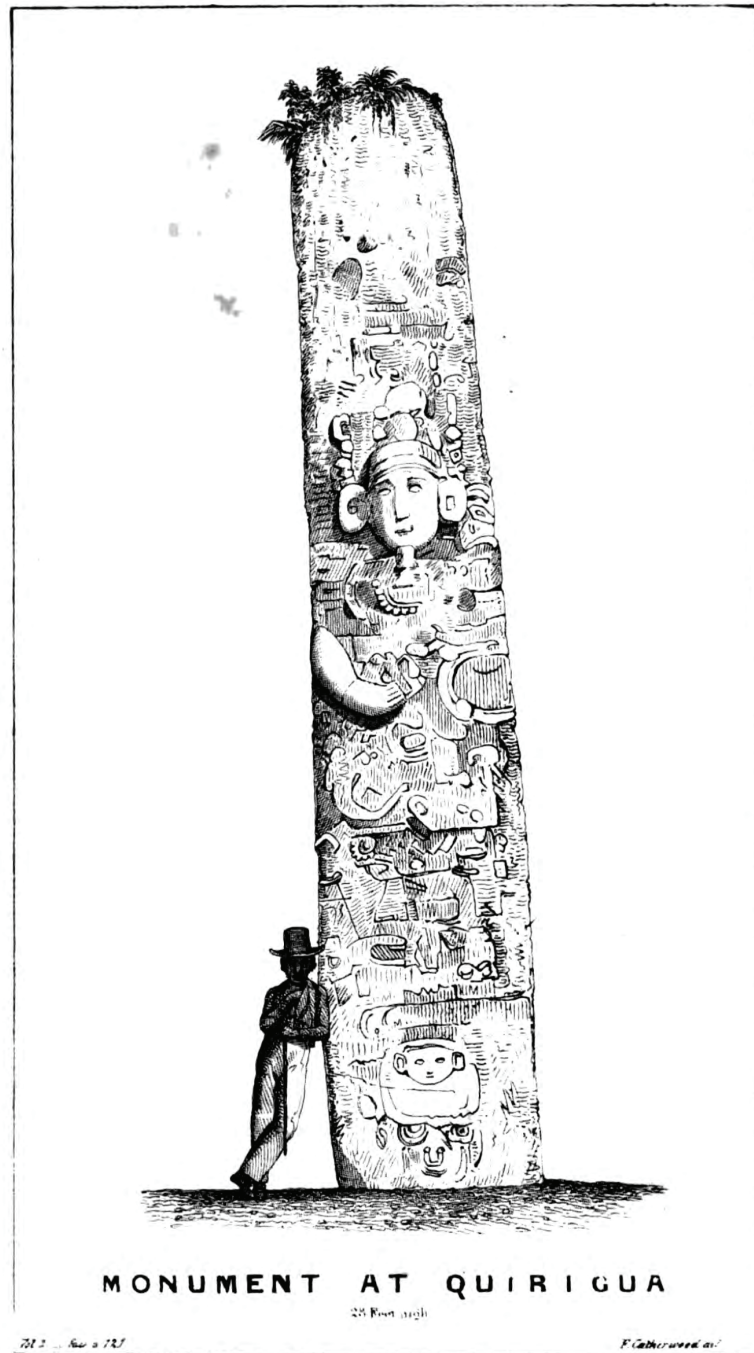


Figure 3 Idol at Quirigua. Drawing by Frederick Catherwood. Plate 36, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (1855)



Figure 4 Stela F, Quirigua, 1883. Photographer: A. Maudslay. 1998.182.7. Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

Also, in a climate of imperialistic ambitions and competitive institutional agendas, highlighted by the meeting of Maudslay and Charnay in 1882 at Yaxchilan (the precise moment Maudslay took on a professional attitude towards his studies), Maudslay's need to take intellectual possession of the sites, as well as impose himself on the subject of Meso-American archaeology in order to compete at a professional level, would have been foremost in his mind. It has been noted that Charnay's own attempts at capturing relief sculpture at Palenque were ultimately a failure, and only produced underexposed hazy images (Just 2012:363). Perhaps during this meeting between the two in 1882, the topic of conversation turned to photography, its use and its limitations. The number of photographs and the efforts that Maudslay took in successfully capturing these same subjects in his own trip of 1892 to Palenque, suggest that he had come to recognize himself to be the dominant Meso-American archaeologist of the date – in no small part due to his impressive photographic skill allowing him to be successful where others had failed.

Emanuel von Friedrichsthal also noted shortly after *Incidents* was published that Catherwood's drawings were often inaccurate to the original monuments (ibid.:361). These inaccuracies reduce their potential as educational and preservationist tools. Maudslay recognized this lack of objective representation in the drawings, along with the possibility that photography could fill this role more objectively, so long as the subject could be captured at all. Again, Maudslay's photographic skill would ensure that this could be done and that the visual fidelity of his photographs filled the epistemic and preservationist void.

Maudslay's frequent reference to both Stephens' observations regarding the monuments and Catherwood's drawings of them, indicate the

important role *Incidents* played in his realization that he would be carrying out the first detailed, systematic and scientific survey of the ruins. Frequently noting in his field journals the errors in, and agreements with, Stephen's descriptions, Maudslay quickly recognized the vast amount of undocumented and important material work still to be conducted, and perhaps began to realize his own possible role as the 'Champollion' of Meso-America. His use of images closely aligned to Catherwood's for the Chicago Exposition, as previously mentioned, came at the precise moment of Maudslay's fruition as an archaeologist. His findings were published, in serial format, throughout the 1890s, and his images were immediately recognized as the finest available material for Western scholars to study, short of the expense and inclination for fieldwork themselves.

The recognition of Maudslay's work as epistemologically valuable as well as aesthetically recognizable suggests a considered methodology designed to recreate Catherwood's drawings photographically, rather than as a mere model for unoriginal compositions. In doing so, Maudslay promoted himself to the top of the Meso-American archaeological world, despite his lack of formal training or alliance with the large academic or national institutions. Maudslay's constant self-promotion is evident in his published works. *Biologia Centrali Americana: Archaeologia* begins each geographical section with a detailed narration of his journey, the difficulties he faced and his own emotive descriptions of the work that was carried out. *Glimpse of Guatemala* (1899), jointly authored by Maudslay and his wife Annie, was an uncompromising tale in the style of Stephen's narration. Annie wrote the majority of the narrative, with Alfred's archaeological contributions unceremoniously interrupting the



flow of the book. Yet this is a considered attempt at a travel narrative, far beyond the scale of his previous *BCA* introductions. Finally, in 1930 Maudslay published *Life in the Pacific Fifty Years Ago*, a now long forgotten and much ignored memoir that appears to be the first volume of a larger autobiography that was never completed. It details his birth, schooling and colonial career, right up to the moment he chose to investigate the Mayan ruins he had read about in Stephens' *Incidents*. It is speculation to suggest that had Maudslay lived another few years, a second volume regarding his life and work in Central America would have followed; however, in the planning of such a publication the two halves of Maudslay's life would make for a very convenient break in which to separate two volumes. Maudslay was clearly not adverse to self-promotion, and by utilizing the visual strategy of pastiche, the images could conform to divergent, both epistemological and narrative, roles.

Catherwood's drawings are illustrations of a romanticized narrative. He illustrated the text in order to give the highest possible drama to the visualization of the ruins. Maudslay's photographs also often appear to be aimed towards this illustration of narrative. His images often have limited archaeological relevance, but serve a role more akin to the development of a *mise-en-scène* for the illustration of the theatrical (and romantic) display of his personal journey and discoveries, which he includes in the introductions of each site volume in the scientifically based *BCA* publication. By using the term '*mise-en-scène*' I refer to the creation of images through the positioning and arrangement of their profilmic

elements.<sup>15</sup> Key here is the creation, rather than the haphazard or serendipitous formation, of the elements that create the images' structure; for example lighting, pose, figure arrangement and space. These short descriptions may not be to the length or dramatic standard of Stephens' texts, yet they describe similar experiences as *Incidents* – the tropical heat, the waves of dangerous insects, difficult journeys by horseback, the fortitude of the author himself over adversity experienced in the cause of discovery. These are hardly scientifically based texts for the illustration of archaeological data.

The intentional arrangement of individual elements is a key indicator of an ambition to create an aesthetic, rather than a evidential, image; one whose meaning is based upon a widely recognizable visual tradition, and not the epistemological communication of factual evidence. The delivery of narrative, in this case the story of Maudslay's journey, is therefore placed at a higher importance than the salience of archaeological data in the communicative messages of these pastiche images. The similarity of many of Maudslay's photographs to Catherwood's illustrations should not be therefore overlooked, it goes to the very heart of his intentions during his early journeys – the very reason why he was in the forests of Central America in the first place (see Figure 5).

Catherwood aimed his illustrations squarely at popular culture, rather than at any precise archaeological or scientific interest, despite their later inclusion into the archaeological record

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15 This definition largely derives from film theory and its precise meaning is often in flux. *Mise-en-scène* is most often understood as the accumulated effect of the various technical and aesthetic elements used by the director/creator in the creation of an emotive visualization for the camera (Bordwell and Thompson 2003).



Figure 5 Stela C, Quirigua, 1883. Photographer: A. Maudslay. 1998.182.11 Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

of the region. Yet Maudslay made a specific choice to recreate the Catherwood photographs, rather than attempting original compositions, which could even have been more useful in archaeological data capture or more aligned with the general compositional elements and attempts at objective representation being utilized in archaeology at this date (for example in the work of Maler or Thompson, both of whom were operating at the same locations in the same period as Maudslay).

### Conclusion

It is likely, given that Maudslay had neither formal archaeological education nor any experience in museum-oriented survey techniques, that the illustrations in *Incidents* acted as models for his photography. By recreating the images in photographs, something Catherwood had also attempted (although none of these images now survive), Maudslay could achieve consistently appropriate results – the representation and preservation of the monuments through the visual conventions created by *Incidents*, which were already operating as a visual and preservative technology within Maya archaeology, but this time in a medium widely held to be objectively accurate.

By recreating the Catherwood drawings photographically, Maudslay celebrates and critiques the drawings: celebrating the romanticized idea of these lost ruins, and taking intellectual possession of them; whilst also simultaneously critiquing the drawings as factually inaccurate and inappropriate for the purpose of preservation.

While *Incidents* acted as a visual guide to the ruins and as inspiration for his interest, it also operated as instructive for the practice of visually representing archaeological sites in terms more suitable for accurate preservation.

In doing so Maudslay continued the visual traditions of romanticism and Victorian arts in archaeological visualization, while simultaneously rejecting the preservative role of these subjective practices. Although Maudslay's later work was directed towards the systematic capturing of the Mayan sites by both casting and photographic techniques, and aimed as a comprehensive academic investigation of Meso-American archaeology, I would argue that his images from before 1883 should be interpreted as the photographic explorations of an amateur adventurer and photographer, documenting the ruins of Central America in the name of an objective visual representation that Catherwood could not achieve with drawing.

We must also recognize that the mammoth publication that became the seminal *BCA* had yet to be conceived. It was only in 1888 that Maudslay even began to think about publication, how he had previously intended his photographic collection to be seen is not known, most likely through exhibition alongside his casts. Prior to his first cast-making exercises – late in his trip of 1882, and perfected in 1883 in Quirigua – his exploration and preservative efforts were exclusively photographic in nature, he did not even attempt sketches, relying instead on the fidelity and objectivity of the camera.

Maudslay's intentions for publication were most likely to have been in the mode of a grand travel narrative given his, and popular culture's, interest in books of that genre. Maudslay's descriptions from his early excavations are purely narrative, with seemingly minimal archaeological relevance. They are aimed at providing an exciting and romantic tale, with detailed descriptions of the journeys to and from England, across the jungle and of episodes that occur along the way. Details regarding archaeology at the sites are initially short and unsatisfactory for

any scientific interest; their more satisfactory depiction begins after 1883 in Quirigua, and by 1885, in Copan, they dominate Maudslay's notebooks, with the narrative side falling away in favour of notes on archaeological features and ornamentation, as well as copious pages of geographical mapping figures and longitude and latitude readings.<sup>16</sup> Later in life, after his excavation work was complete, Maudslay turned to narrative travel publication and autobiography, continually using the same imagery he had used for archaeological data. Whilst this recoding of his imagery is not unusual, particularly in the histories of photography and archaeology, his early adoption of narration over archaeological significance in his photographs and field journals suggests Maudslay's intentions included not only archaeological preservation but also a personal legacy of his own making. The presentation of archaeological data and authorial narratives are not mutually exclusive. Photography is able to do, and through the recodability of imagery keenly attuned to, both simultaneously. Maudslay's consistent photographic endeavours, even beyond the archaeological subjects, suggest that photography was not only a tool for his work in preserving the Mayan archaeology or for transmitting data more accessibly. To Maudslay, photography was a key part of his own self-perception.

The dialogue between the photographs and Catherwood's drawings details the historiography and development of the ideal of objective recording in the sciences, while retaining the grand Victorian aesthetic of romantic travel illustration, which itself is part of the history of colonization and in alignment with the attitudes of beneficial imperial modernity.

Yet that we have Maudslay's work at all is thanks to the inspiring nature of *Incidents* and its influence on a young man in search of adventure and opportunity far away from the comfortable English gentility of a wealthy Victorian life. With the invention of roll-film, hand-held cameras and a new body of archaeologists ready to jump out from the shadow of Maudslay, large-format, richly toned and beautiful photographs of Meso-America would be replaced by the smaller and less visually dramatic photographs that came to dominate archaeology.

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ISSN 2397-1754

ISBN 978-0-900632-54-9

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