Alfred Kidder II
1911-1984

Alfred Kidder II (called Alf, Alfie, Ted, or Teddy by family, friends, and colleagues) was born on August 2, 1911, on Nantucket Island. He was the eldest of five children born to the pioneer Southwestern and Mesoamerican archaeologist Alfred Vincent Kidder (1885-1963) and Madeleine Appleton (1881-1981). The young Kidder attended the Noble and Greenough School in Dedham (1922-1926), and Phillips Academy in Andover (1926-1929). He graduated magna cum laude from Harvard College in 1933, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree; at Harvard he was on the track and football teams, and belonged to the A.D. and the Hasty Pudding Clubs. He obtained both his M.A. (1935) and his Ph.D. (1937) from Harvard, and taught at that institution from 1937 to 1945, except for a four-year period during World War II. In 1950, Kidder came to the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania (Fig. 4), where he was Curator of the American Section (1967-1971) and Associate Director (1960-1967). He also taught in the Department of Anthropology until his retirement in 1971, having attained the rank of professor in 1962.

On June 23, 1940, he married Mary Barber (1914-1977), daughter of Thomas Barber of the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University; the next day they departed for Venezuela (M. Kidder 1942). Mary Kidder accompanied and assisted her husband on almost all of his expeditions, a not uncommon practice of that time. She spoke Spanish fluently and had had much experience in mending and restoring pottery in the Peabody Museum at Harvard. She also kept accounts and assisted in archaeological record-keeping, as well as in publication preparation. Between 1942 and 1946 Kidder served in the United States Army Air Forces in the ranks of first lieutenant to major. He was involved in administration of training of foreign air force personnel. He received the Legion of Merit and decorations by the governments of China, France, and Brazil. Kidder had an avid interest in birds, in fishing, and in collecting figurines of bulls. He was a member of the Tavern and Somers Club of Boston and the Blue Hill Country Club. He died on February 8, 1984, age 72, and was buried at St. David's Church in Waynes, PA.

South American Research

Within archaeology, Kidder was best known for his investigations in the Lake Titicaca Basin, but he also made contributions to the archaeology of Venezuela, and produced a notable synthesis of archaeological research in the Andes. A list of his major publications is presented below.

His decision to specialize in South American archaeology was certainly influenced by a desire to distinguish his own career from that of his famous father (John H. Rowe, pers. com. 1988, Woodbury 1973). Much of his childhood was spent in Pecos, New Mexico, where his father carried out a landmark field project between 1915 and 1929. Kidder confessed to an early fascination with being a cowboy, but as an adult he chose to be an archaeologist. He began archaeological field research in 1929 when he carried out a reconnaissance in southeastern Utah with Frank H. H. Roberts, Jr., for Harvard University.

Kidder's survey and excavations in northern Venezuela during 1933 and 1934 constituted his first field work in Latin America and formed the basis of his Ph.D. thesis (1937). The 1934 research was sponsored by Harvard and represented the Peabody Museum's first direct involvement in South American archaeology. A large collection of pottery and other artifacts were brought back to the Peabody, and Kidder later published a monograph on this Venezuelan work (1944). In 1948 he produced a highly regarded synthesis of Venezuelan archaeology for the Handbook of South American Indians. In 1956, Kidder also worked in Honduras (Fig. 2).

He went to Peru for the first time in the summer of 1937, in preparation for a course on Andean archaeology he was to teach at Harvard (Fig. 3). During a two-month period he carried out reconnaissance with emphasis on the southern highlands, and his report on these activities represents his first writing on Andean archaeology. In Peru, he was accompanied for a time by Julio C. Tello, one of the fathers of Peruvian archaeology and an old friend of Mary Kidder's parents. In Bolivia, he visited Tiahuanaco, guided by Arthur Posnansky, known for his extensive volumes on the site and culture.

It was during this 1937 trip that Kidder first visited Puebla (see map, p. 3) and realized the site had archaeological potential: it had a good stratigraphic sequence to provide a chronological guide, and was related to other important prehis- toric sites in the region, such as Chiripa and Tiahuanaco (see chronologi- cal chart on p. 3). He brought back to the Peabody, a small collection of sherds from this and other sites visited in 1937. One of the techniques that Kidder used to gain information about pottery production was petrographic analysis, employing thinly cut sections from the walls of ceramic vessels (see Carage, this issue). Using Pucara, Tiahuanaco and Inca-style sherds from this 1937 collection, he pioneered the use of thin-section analysis for Andean pottery, perhaps influenced by earlier work his father and Anna Shepard had carried out in the southwestern United States. Kidder undertook excavations at Pucara in 1939, sponsored by the Peabody Museum. He uncovered rich middens of human remains, and architecture, including probable house foundations and complex temple (see K. Chumbley, this article, this issue). Mary Kidder (1942) gives a personal account of this and the 1937 trips in her diary, with illustrations of their 1937 living quarters, called the "Harvard Flat" (Fig. 3). For both his 1937 and 1939 investigations, Kidder had been appointed Honorary Fellow of the Institute of Andean Research.

In 1941 Kidder became involved with the ambitious Inter-American Affairs archaeological program.

In 1939 Kidder and his wife Mary went to Honduras on a Smithsonian Institution-Harvard University archaeological expedition. Excavations were carried out in the Uba, Comagagua, and Chamelecón Valleys. From 1939 to 1943, Paul de Paul Strong, Alfred Kidder II, Mary Kidder, and William Duncan Strong. (Photo: National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, courtesy of The University Museum)
Department of Pune; his aim was to discover the nature and extent of the Pucara culture, and to locate additional related early sites in the northern Lake Titicaca Basin. Under 1943 and 1944, he was on a research project in Bolivia, and in 1945 in Peru (Kiddier 1956a). This project marked a renewal of the Museum's Andean research program after a 30-year hiatus. The investi- gation was aimed at correcting "the disparity between our knowledge of coast and highland..." and at establishing a more comprehensive archaeology (Kiddier 1956a:21; see also Chavez and Chavez n.d.).

Kiddier took advantage of the recent development of radiocarbon dating as a method of resolving chronological problems. He believed that the use of radiocarbon dating was not only more precise than the "old" techniques, but also more reliable than the "old" techniques, which were based on the assumption that the earth's magnetic field was constant. As a result, Kiddier's work was directed at resolving cultural and historical problems, many of which are still not satisfactorily answered today. He sought to solve chronological problems, determine the geographical distribution of settlement and styles during specific periods, and describe the origins, nature, development, and relationships between the archaeological cultures of the Titicaca, Chancay, Huaroc, and Tiahuanaco (see chart, p. 2; Kiddier 1943v:vi, 37-40, 1948s, 1956a). He was cautious and thorough in his description and interpretation of the archaeological evidence. Despite the number of years that have passed since Kiddier's research was undertaken, his pioneering, long-term, and broad-based investigations still stand as important contributions to our understanding of Andean prehistory.