

Zelia Nuttall

[originally published in *American Anthropologist*, 35:475-482, 1933]

ALFRED M. TOZZER

Harvard University

ZELIA MARIA MAGDALENA NUTTALL,¹ when a child, was presented by her mother, who was born in Mexico, with a copy of Lord Kingsborough's great work on Mexican antiquities. These volumes immediately awakened her interest, and this interest developed into a life-long quest for information on Mexico, its archaeology and its early history.

She was born in San Francisco, California, September 6, 1857, and she died at Casa Alvarado, Coyoacan, Mexico on April 12, 1933. She was the daughter of Dr. Robert Kennedy Nuttall and Magdalena, daughter of John Parrott, banker, of San Francisco. Her father, descended from an old Lancashire family, was born in Ireland and, after extensive travels, arrived in San Francisco from Australia in 1850. He practiced medicine in San Francisco until 1865 when, owing to ill health, he took his family to Europe where they remained until 1876 when they returned to San Francisco. Mrs. Nuttall was then nineteen years of age and had acquired an education in France, Germany, Italy, and England, where she studied at Bedford College, London. This gave her the versatility in languages which was to play a great part in her later life.

In 1880 she married Alphonse Louis Pinart of Marquise, Pas-de-Calais, France, who had been sent out on an anthropological expedition to the Pacific from France. He also traveled from the Aleutian islands and Alaska to the coast of South America, making extensive collections of archaeological and ethnological specimens. His special interests and his publications are mostly, however, on linguistics and folk-lore.

After his marriage, he and his wife made a journey to the West Indies, France, and Spain, when they returned to San Francisco where their only child, Nadine, was born in 1882. The marriage proved unhappy. A deed of separation was executed in 1884 and in 1888 a divorce was granted to Zelia, the decree allowing her the custody of the child and the resumption of her maiden name for herself and daughter. The

daughter, now Mrs. Arthur C. Laughton, three grandchildren and a brother, Professor George H. F. Nuttall, Sc.D., F.R.S., the distinguished scientist of Cambridge, England, survive.

Mrs. Nuttall's first visit to Mexico was in 1884-1885 in company with her mother, younger brother, sister, and her daughter. Here she spent five months; she worked in the National Museum and made her first collection of small terracotta heads from San Juan Teotihuacan which formed the subject for her first paper published in 1886. After living in Baltimore for a year she went to Dresden in 1886 and resided there until 1899. This period was broken by a trip to California and travels in Italy, Sweden, Spain, Switzerland, and Russia. In 1902 she finally settled permanently in Mexico with an occasional trip to Europe and to the United States, and one to Alaska and to Honolulu. Twice during this period she visited some of the ruins of Yucatan.

For forty-seven years she was Honorary Assistant in Mexican Archaeology at the Peabody Museum of Harvard University. In his annual report for 1886, the Curator of this Museum, Professor F. W. Putnam, wrote,

It is with pleasure that I am able to state that Mrs. Zelia Nuttall has become one of the collaborators of the Museum, with special reference to Mexican archaeology, a field in which, by family associations and long residence in the country, she is able to perform thorough and important work. Familiar with the Nahuatl language, having intimate and influential friends among the Mexicans, and with an exceptional talent for linguistics and archaeology, as well as being thoroughly informed in all the early native and Spanish writings relating to Mexico and its people, Mrs. Nuttall enters the study with a preparation as remarkable as it is exceptional.

At the inauguration of a series of Papers of the Peabody Museum in 1891, she contributed the first number of the first volume, a study of a famous and historical feather head-dress which she had seen in the Imperial Museum of Natural History in Vienna.

In 1901, after thirteen years of study, she finally published her largest work, "The Fundamental Principles of New and Old World Civilizations." She started with a study of the

¹ I am indebted especially to Professor G. H. F. Nuttall and to Mrs. Arthur Laughton, to Dr. George Vaillant and to Mrs. Elsie McDougall for facts contained in this paper.

astronomical origin of the Swastika and the worship of the Pole Star in Mexico. She extended the scope of her investigations to the Zuñi in New Mexico and to Central America and Peru. Then she crossed the Pacific and Eastern Asia to Asia Minor; Egypt, Greece, Rome and western Europe were finally included in her investigations. She distinctly states that she did not wish to propound any theory, but she implies a world-wide worship of the Swastika, as the symbol of the four quarters and of the North Star as the central stable power, when she writes,

It will seem that the outcome of my researches corroborates the opinions differently expressed by a long line of eminent investigators, who have been constantly discovering and pointing out undeniable similarities and identities between the civilization of both hemispheres.

These ideas fell upon the receptive ear of Professor Putnam, who held throughout his life a conviction that the Americas received their greatest cultures through Asia, and he was very proud that his Museum could publish her paper.

The book was one of the last to be written by an acknowledged Mexican archaeologist on this connection between the New and the Old World. In spite of its "archaic" character, it had a considerable influence in attracting several students to the Middle American field.

Mrs. Nuttall's fame rests more firmly upon her ability to find lost or forgotten manuscripts and bring them to the attention of scholars. The most famous case was the Zapotecan manuscript found in the possession of Lord Zouche of Haynworth. Mrs. Nuttall traced this codex from the Monastery of San Marco, Florence, to its later owner. At Professor Putnam's insistence this manuscript, as published by the Peabody Museum, was named "Codex Nuttall." Still earlier, in 1890, in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Florence, she re-discovered the so-called Codex Magliabecchiano XIII. 3. This was published in 1903 by the University of California under the title, "The Book of the Life of the Ancient Mexicans." She also found in the National Library at Madrid in 1911 an anonymous unfinished manuscript, written about 1559, on the history of the Conquest of Mexico which she had copied.

Mrs. Nuttall's keen and experienced eyes are no better shown than in her discovery of the Drake manuscripts in the National Archives of Mexico when she was searching for the earliest records of the trials of Mexicans for witchcraft by the Inquisition. Not content with this find,

she sought in New York, in the Spanish, Italian, and French archives, and in the Bodleian Library, British Museum and Public Record Office in London for other unpublished Drake and Hawkins papers. The results of this extended search were published by the Hakluyt Society, London, in 1914. An example of her thoroughness is seen when she made a trip on a freight steamer to Alaska in 1916 to visit Juan de Fuca strait which she felt sure she had identified as Drake's "Bay of New Albion."

It should be recorded that it was Mrs. Nuttall who first recognized the so-called archaic culture. Shortly after 1902 when she settled in Mexico permanently she discovered an unfamiliar type of figurine under a stratum of lava near her own home. In 1906 she recovered one complete seated figurine of the archaic type. In 1909, in a visit to Bishop Plancarte in Cuernavaca, she recognized the same type in his collection from Morelos, Guerrero and Hidalgo. Independently they had both come to the conclusion that these objects antedated any of the Aztec remains. The Bishop, in his "Tamoanchan" published in 1911, describes the early remains and mentions the coincidence of discovery. A year earlier Mrs. Nuttall had found the same general type in Panuco, near Tampico.

A knowledge of the writers contemporary with the Conquest and other early authorities is an indispensable adjunct to all archaeological research. This knowledge was held by Mrs. Nuttall to a remarkable degree. Almost all of her papers show her great erudition along this line.

In 1902 Mrs. Nuttall purchased the famous house which stood on the site of one once belonging to Alvarado, a name which figures in the Conquest of Mexico second only to that of Cortes. Here in an environ of Mexico City, in this historic house and beautiful, full of treasures, with the famed beauty of its gardens for a setting, Mrs. Nuttall played the gracious hostess to all visiting archaeologists and people of note who came to Mexico. The house, the gardens, and its brilliant chatelaine have figured in the annals of many travellers.

Her intense love for flowers and the long hours when she worked over them made her an authority on Mexican gardens. A series of papers and an unpublished semi-popular manuscript make this very plain. A visiting archaeologist would as often find her training her roses as at work at her desk. She would continue her work and keep up at the same time a delightful talk on the newest "finds" in archaeology. Her botanical interests were wide.

She collected seeds of ancient Mexican food plants not known to the Department of Agriculture for cultivation in the United States, she helped to introduce the Hawaiian taro plant into the State of Orizaba where the climate seemed suitable, and she made a large collection of native Mexican medicinal herbs.

It was in her own gardens in 1923 that, under the auspices of the Dirección de Antropología and Señor Manuel Gamio, she made the first complete study of Aztec pottery in a given site.

During the last years of her life she became much interested in the question of a sun cult throughout Middle America and Peru. She believed that round towers such as the Caracol at Chichen Itza, the Maya subterranean chultunes and a "neglected mound" at Monte Alban were all a kind of gnomon made to record the shadowless passage of the sun at noon through the zenith on a day in May and she interpreted this astronomical phenomenon as the origin of a belief that the beneficial descent of the rain god came at this moment. Proof to the people of this idea was afforded by the appearance at this time of the summer rains. Characteristically, she summoned to aid her in this theory a mass of evidence from the early records. She spent much effort in having this May day celebrated by the children of Mexico as the New Year Festival of their ancestors with games and feasting around a gnomon set up in the plazas or in the courtyard of houses. Not satisfied with having Mexico carryout this festival, she entered into negotiations with several Peruvian associations to have the New Year Festival celebrated there, thus reviving a former "intellectual unity among the ancient peoples of tropical America."

Among her last papers was an attempt to identify some of the golden jewelry found by Dr. Caso at Monte Alban as showing that here was the tomb of Cuauhtemoc, the last of the Aztec kings, who died while a prisoner in the hands of Cortes in his memorable march to Honduras. Here again she summoned the ancient authorities to buttress her theory. She left several uncompleted manuscripts, among them one describing the famous battle at San Juan de Ulua based on over seven hundred pages of documentary material which she had copied in Spain in 1911-12. She planned this as a companion volume to her *New Light on Drake*.

Mrs. Nuttall's vivid mind, independent will, and a remarkable belief in the truth of her theories caused her life to be punctuated with controversies. There was the altercation with the

Duc de Loubat over the publication of the Magliabecchiano Codex which, although discovered by Mrs. Nuttall, received its first publication in a Loubat edition. Another more famous one, with right entirely on her side, was with the late Leopoldo Batres, a former inspector of ruins of Mexico. The extent of her righteous grievance is well documented in a paper by her on "The Island of Sacrificios," which, in some ways, is her greatest contribution to the knowledge of the field archaeology of Mexico.

In addition to the connection of forty-seven years with the Peabody Museum at Cambridge, and twenty-five years as Honorary Professor of Archaeology at the National Museum of Mexico, she was for a long time a member of the Advisory Council of the Department of Anthropology at the University of California and field director of the Crocker archaeological field research. She was a member of the International Jury of Awards at the Chicago Exposition in 1893 and at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in 1904, and was awarded gold medals at the Historical Exposition in Madrid in 1892, at Chicago in 1893 and at the Buffalo Exposition in 1901. She was a Fellow of the American Anthropological Association, the American Ethnological Society, the American Geographical Society, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Hispanic Society of America, and the Royal Anthropological Institute. She was a member of the American Philosophical Society, the American Asiatic Association, the Numismatic and Antiquarian Society of Philadelphia, and the California Academy of Sciences, and she was a corresponding member of foreign societies in Paris, Geneva, London, Rome, Stockholm, Lima, and Mexico.

She had a vivid personality and was the very last of the great pioneers of Mexican archaeology. An empty Casa Alvarado will leave a void in the life of Mexico City. It was literally a mecca for all visitors to Mexico. A day seldom arrived without its complement of letters of introduction to Madame Zelia Nuttall from all over the world. Her abundant hospitality, her solicitous care that her visitors miss nothing of interest in Mexico, and her carefully pre-arranged picnics to see native life on the lagoons of Xochimilco went on almost literally to the day of her death. Not only as an archaeological student with a profound knowledge of early authorities was Mrs. Nuttall famous, but she had an intimate acquaintance with Colonial history and Colonial architecture. She was never weary

of pointing out the architectural details of her own historic house and in its gardens she had a large collection of native trees, shrubs and flowers. Not only in Mexico, but at the many American and European international congresses she attended she was always a center of interest, not only for her majestic presence, her wit, and her knowledge, but for her great ability to speak all the European languages. She was a remarkable example of nineteenth century versatility.

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