

Leroy Joesink-Mandeville

1935-2004

PROFESSOR OF ANTHROPOLOGY, EMERITUS

B.A., California State University, Sacramento; M.A., Mexico City College; Ph.D., Tulane,
University

California State University, Fullerton From September 1966 to 1998

Birth: January 21, 1935; Death May 8, 2004

Leroy Joesink Mandeville's monument is Yarumela. His fieldwork was Yarumela in Honduras, which he often referred to as a "Banana Republic." For those who knew him, this was an affectionate moniker that in ways satisfied some of his adventurous fantasies. Like many of us his field site satiated a kind of wanderlust, both mental and physical, the "Indiana Jones Complex," as I think of it now, or the "Lone Ranger and Tonto Complex," for those of you who require an older generation's radio and TV role model. (In anthropology there is supposed to be a sidekick, or cultural guide, in the scenarios.) Or maybe it's just the "ants in the seat of one pants syndrome," for those who are not anthropologists in name but at least in spirit and just feel the urge to get away from time to time.

A gentle kindness marked his life, and with a good and decent human nature, he had a willingness to serve as a favorite counselor and mentor. Students adored him for his zeal, for his rapt attention to detail, and for his excruciating breadth of knowledge. I think too they loved him for his basic genuineness. We all talked about him, students and colleagues alike, with total affection and admiration, for his quirks mostly; and, we all occasionally chided him or maliciously goaded him into making politically incorrect statements, not that he needed much encouragement to do so.

These are some of his outstanding personal qualities. He was also a good archaeologist, meticulously writing up field site reports and assessments, for decades taking students to Yarumela, year after year excavating and analyzing, digging and sifting, pulling together the history of un-deciphered structures, like a kid piecing together those 1000 piece puzzles or, to change the metaphor, like a deliciously gleeful child uncovering a seashell of the shore lapped by the pleasant waters of newly discovered knowledge.

There is something mysterious, even romantic and adventurous about archaeology. How many of us have been stirred by the finding of an arrowhead or a potsherd in a plowed field. Cultural objects fashioned by unknown hands ages ago trigger the imagination. Combining his far-reaching knowledge of archaeology with his unique abilities as a raconteur, LeRoy instilled in his students a rewarding intellectual quest and the thrill of discovery.

He returned with students whose MA theses now line our shelves--some dust-rouged, some the exercise of students' studied diligence, their youthful authors gone on to Ph.D.s -- a wealth of archaeological knowledge that continues the legacy of Yarumela and the department's

association with it and with LeRoy. He came back from Honduras with speculations about the Yarumela site, new discoveries, maps, outlines and blown-up tales of intrigue and constructed mysteries. He also returned with cats, a passion for their welfare shared by his wife Sylvia.

In fact, at home his wife Sylvia ably assisted him, and he, her. Aside from their cat cult connection, they shared a fantastic knowledge of Central America. Paralleling LeRoy's archaeological digs, Sylvia focused upon the interpretation of glyphs, making use of her extraordinary patience and meticulous conscientiousness to decipher them. Paralleling LeRoy's newfound interest in the Silk Trail, Samarkand and Tashkent, Sylvia focused on Turkish archaeology; and, paralleling LeRoy's extraordinary interest in castles and warfare, was Sylvia's connoisseur passion for ethno-botany.

It proved to be a remarkable compatibility because their interests dovetailed and expanded outward, separate interest that converged. LeRoy worked out his journeys with infinite care, an almost exacerbating exercise for those intrigued by, or made a victim of, his blow-by-blow description of one proposed itinerary or another. Sylvia did the same with her careful planning for sojourns in Turkey and its glorious archaeological sites, or perhaps a trip to conduct ethno-botanical data in Central America – maybe, as one now suspects, to collect plants for her personal botanical backyard garden. Since both LeRoy and Sylvia shared a talkative streak, there was a lot to talk about on their respective returns. I always wonder how one got a word in edgewise on the other.

LeRoy's education began at Sac State. At one time he told me much about his background, but I've forgotten most of it, since his more current interests and personality just seemed as dramatic as anything that had gone on before. He went on to study in Mexico City, and then to Tulane University, in New Orleans; this somehow is totally appropriate given the Mandeville name, because there is a street named Mandeville in New Orleans. Coincidence no doubt, yet somehow I always wonder. And from Tulane...the rest is archaeological history that others are better able to describe than I. Let me just note that he was the recipient of several Fulbright Awards and numerous intramural grants that supported his and, indirectly, his students' research. He also wrote dozens of articles chronicling his research.

My encounter with LeRoy began after I had applied to CSUF in 1989. I received a phone call from him--he was then chair of the recruitment committee of the department--and I was struck by the fact that, although he asked plenty of questions, he seemed to answer most of them. I thought, how odd, and I recall my mother saying that if that was a telephone interview there wasn't much to it in terms of my contribution. Years later, during an MA oral for a student, LeRoy answered all the questions I asked the candidate; and so, with such expert backing, the student successfully passed his MA oral presentation, and we moved to the Off-Campus Pub to celebrate.

After entering the department, and becoming one of LeRoy's colleagues, I found that he was a very gentle person but definitely loquacious and most definitely infinite in his encyclopedic knowledge. LeRoy had some knowledge about just about any topic that I would bring up; or in a pinch, a suspicious opinion involving a host of historical and geographical villains that attended his exegesis. What a ripe mind. I especially enjoyed his information about World War II aircraft, since as a boy I had built Revell and Monogram models of them. There was no way to beat him in the vastness of his knowledge, especially the insightful stuff about his personal

passions: World War I and World War II, the castles of Europe. Actually you name it, and off one would ride into the sunset escorted by a talking encyclopedia. So many times LeRoy followed me up to the department office where I could get my mail (he already had his) then followed me back down talking all the time. Glorious moments, as I look back upon them now.

Often these conversations were, let me say, “conspiratorialist,” to coin a word. LeRoy was a conspirator’s prized dream who, like John le Carré’s spy heroes, saw intrigue behind every motive, underhand behind every action and film noir in every event -- often correctly I might add. He never ranted, but insinuated; and, to me he was capable of building the largest conspiratorial spider webs known to humankind. I suppose the long and short of it is that he was an eccentric gem of profound magnitude and luster sometimes locked into a world of wonderful intrigue. Karl Marx might have called them webs of mystification; Clifford Geertz, webs of signification. LeRoy epitomized both sides of the Marx-Geertz dichotomy.

He was generous with both his time and acknowledgments. LeRoy fostered my interest in archaeology without knowing he had done so. He discussed his Yarumela research, and I shared with him my Benin Kingdom data. This stimulated his research into reevaluating notions about chieftaincy and rank in Central America, and his conversations piqued my latent interest in historical and scientific archaeology. It appears that in every paper he wrote since then he mentioned me as an important inspiration of his new Yarumela reinterpretation. I have always appreciated that gracious acknowledgment.

As LeRoy began to think about retiring, his exaggerated interest in Europe with its enticing castles came to the fore. It seemed just right for him. Castles and their turrets, bulwarks and bastions, battering rams and boiling oil, a more than dilettantish desire for sure – perhaps that of the romantic that lingered in him from his youth and still pulsed in his heart. Perhaps it became critical for LeRoy to witness firsthand what he must have thought about as a child, as do most of us in a way. These fantasy thoughts carried over into his adulthood as a casual but deeply informed, sidebar exercise, like collecting stamps but closer to the proverbial search for a holy grail. As for his interest in warfare, the History Channel seemed to confirm aficionados’ affections for the history war. One can easily empathize with his passionate desire to visit those monuments of medieval war in Europe. “In days of old when knights were bold and maidens were in flower” – how boring must the Alamo or Fort Ticonderoga be by comparison to such a challenge poised in the mind’s imagination of a Europeanist at heart?

One is happy that at least he satisfied his academic interests and some of those personal quests. To encounter not just in desire but also in fact: the ruins of Yarumela, its chieftaincy evolution that he so capably traced, the students he trained, the archaeologists – local, national and world-wide – that he knew and some of whom he trained and finally those castles and their bastions, goals of youthful exuberance long dreamed about.

One may perhaps now encounter the spirit of LeRoy in the wind whispers of the Encyclopedia According to LeRoy, 69th Edition, or on a visit to one of his beloved castles. Perhaps one can see him on a parapet at Warwick Castle or maybe as a bowman at Hereford Castle or as a glistening body-armored Lancelot riding out over the drawbridge in the early morning dawn amid the dewed grass of a mythical castle to fight the mythical dragon and defend a mythical lady’s honor. He had begun making plans to visit Granada in Spain, maybe also Madrid, and

elsewhere too, wherever there was a castle. It seemed he was by all accounts a very gentle knight, a Don Quixote forever somehow tilting at windmills.

Submitted by

Joseph Nevadomsky

Professor of Anthropology

February 22, 2012 (Originally delivered as a eulogy for LeRoy Joesink-Mandeville, May 21, 2004)