

The author starts with a journey she and her mother took to Entre Ríos in 2001, part of 'Argentine cultural tourism', an effort to rescue the immigrant past and, hence, to profit from the manufacturing of a sellable past. The tour was, in many ways, difficult: it took more time than expected, they weren't capable of reaching certain sites as a result of heavy rains, and they reached others only after long detours. The tour was across space as much as it was across time, and therein, according to Freidenberg, was the origin of her ethnographic project.

Unfortunately, Freidenberg does not possess an engaging style. There is no excitement in her sentences, and she writes like a dutiful, trite academic. There is enough pathos in her material to make an epic, yet she delivers it in the monotone that exemplifies scholarly studies: sternly, presumptuously, as if on automatic, accumulating information as if she wasn't telling a tale but crafting an encyclopaedia entry. Yet in spite of its stylistic shortcomings, *The Invention of the Jewish Gaucho* is a provocative contribution in that it appreciates Villa Clara not in isolation but as a microcosm through which it is possible to comprehend Argentina as a whole. 'A small sample', the author argues, 'illuminates both the history and social organization of the larger society; and, conversely, the local events are better understood within the context of larger units of analysis'.

The fact that Freidenberg works at the University of Maryland is of capital importance. She responds to the question 'Were there Jewish Gauchos?' by looking at Argentina as multicultural, a kind of southern-hemisphere United States where assimilation doesn't result in the renouncement of an immigrant's ethnic identity but in its wholehearted embrace through a hyphen: Jewish-Argentines are what the inhabitants of Villa Clara are in Freidenberg's opinion, just as she herself is an Argentine-American. Is the tourist-cum-ethnographer thus imposing the way of thinking in her current culture to the subject she scrutinises? That the processes of acculturation in the two nations are not identical is a fundamental topic she fails to address.

Amberst College

ILAN STAVANS

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Lawrence Gustave Desmond, *Yucatán through her Eyes: Alice Dixon Le Plongeon, Writer and Expeditionary Photographer* (Albuquerque NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2009), pp. xii + 387, \$45.00, hb.

Alice Dixon Le Plongeon was a character, no doubt about it. A writer, photographer, explorer, Mayan archaeologist, public lecturer, committed Spiritualist and women's rights activist, Alice Dixon Le Plongeon is almost impossible to sum up or pin down; she made 'her own rules as she went along' (p. xxi). This biography is the first serious attempt to present a full account of her remarkable life. The volume itself is beautiful, thanks especially to the inclusion of 71 photographs that Alice and her husband Augustus took during their years of expeditions in Yucatán. Moreover, Desmond's biography is based upon his recent discovery of her Yucatán diaries (1873–6), as well as manuscripts, photographs and letters, which spent the greater part of the twentieth century in storage at the United Lodge of Theosophists in Los Angeles. This treasure is now safely held by the Getty Research Institute. Desmond has included lengthy excerpts from these field diaries as part two of this biography.

Allowing Alice to speak to us directly is one of the volume's most valuable contributions to the field.

Alice Dixon was born in London in 1851. Her father had been a copper-plate printer and made the transition to photographer when the technology itself was still fresh. Alice, and other family members, worked as his assistants. Alice and photography grew up together. Alice's husband, Augustus Le Plongeon, was a French doctor (trained through apprenticeship), traveller/adventurer, archaeologist and photographer. He had left Europe as a young man, moving between South and North America to seek his fortune and satisfy his lively curiosity. In Peru, Le Plongeon read the work of Charles E. Brasseur de Bourbourg, who suggested that Old World civilisations originated in the New World. Brasseur's contention that the Maya had influenced Egyptian architecture, writing and religion became the rallying call for Augustus, and eventually Alice. The couple met when Augustus travelled to London to study Mayan artefacts at the British Museum; Alice was 19, and Augustus 25 years her senior. Both committed Spiritualists, each had independently experienced predictions and premonitions that foreshadowed their meeting. Despite their age difference, love and marriage followed: Alice began study of Mayan archaeology so that she might aid her future husband's research, and sought her father's advice on photography in preparation for an expedition to Yucatán.

The photographic record the Le Plongeon created in Yucatán is remarkable, especially when considering the conditions under which they worked. As her father had done in London when she was a child, Alice took pictures of Mayan ruins to document vulnerable edifices. Unlike her father, however, Alice, working with Augustus, had to figure out, for instance, how to ensure that the fragile equipment and supplies (glass plates, cameras, lenses, darkroom equipment) survived being loaded onto a two-wheeled mule-drawn cart pulled along rough roads. Even if all the equipment was usable, photographic technology of the time required lengthy and impractical exposures; time and again a day's work would produce few or no usable plates. Challenges also provided opportunities, however. Through the use of small glass plates (10 × 20 cm), the Le Plongeon were able to take far more photographs than previous expeditions had managed. Thanks to their pioneering use of stereo 3D images, these photographs still 'can be used to generate scaled architectural drawings so that changes over the past one hundred years can be measured by archaeologists and conservators' (p. 91).

The other remarkable record Alice has left behind is her diary, selections of which are transcribed and thoroughly contextualised in this biography. The diary, written up from her notes and her letters to her family, chronicles Alice's daily life in Yucatán and Central America between 1873 and 1876, which involved adventure far removed from the smoky London streets of her previous life. In Belize and the islands in the region, while sailing with cigar smugglers, the couple almost had a shipwreck on a reef in shark-infested waters. Alice's description of their uncovering of the Chac Mool, even for a reader who already knows the outcome, is genuinely suspenseful. Her period in Yucatán also meant that she was a witness to the Caste War, which she viewed as a result of centuries of oppression even as she deplored the violence. The diary provides lovely details of quotidian aspects of the expedition; wearing breeches and boots, and riding astride, Alice also wore a skirt tucked around her waist so that she could unfurl her feminine modesty swiftly when necessary. Perhaps most importantly, Alice's diary provides a fascinating view onto day-to-day life in the place and period, describing socialising, travelling, human relationships

and culture. The diary also proves that, despite their age difference and the gender roles of their time, Alice and Augustus were a team, devoted to each other and sharing a genuine passion for Mayan archaeology. Much of 'their' work was actually her work; nonetheless, upon settling in New York, where she wrote and lectured to support the couple, Alice gave Augustus full credit. Thus, in Alice's lifetime and subsequently, she and her work have suffered from dual prejudices: her work was marginalised (often with her collusion) because she was a woman and because of her insistence on Mayan culture being the origin of ancient Egyptian culture.

The merits of this work are many, and Desmond's grasp of the material is impressive. One of the biography's greatest strengths is that Desmond does not sanitise his account by avoiding 'pseudo-science' or downplaying beliefs that may seem outlandish to today's readers. Rather, he not only addresses these beliefs, as is necessary to create a rounded view of Alice (and Augustus), but also situates the same beliefs in their historic context, when it was not necessarily foolish to consider the possibility that Atlantis gave birth to the Mayan civilisation. Archaeologists, Spiritualists and believers in Atlantis; the Le Plongeons are depicted with their awkward edges unsanded. Moreover, throughout this biography, the personalities of these two larger-than-life pioneers comes through beautifully: adventurous, witty, smart, charming, feminist Alice who lectured on the struggles of women and the poor generally in Yucatán and stood by her man, even as he became the subject of ridicule for his view on Mayan culture; and adventurous but temperamental Augustus, who became his own worst enemy, feuding, holding grudges, resigning from academic bodies in a fury and generally making it difficult for even his supporters to back him. The shortcomings of this biography are a shame, considering how fascinating the life stories of this couple are and how rich the primary material is. This biography was a chance to make Alice, Augustus and the places they lived and worked come alive. Alice's diary certainly has this vibrant depth, but the rest of the volume sometimes lacks the wider context and rich detail that makes the genre of biography so appealing. This criticism stems from a greediness to know more, to lose myself entirely in the story precisely because the characters and situations that Desmond depicts are so fascinating. Desmond closes his preface by noting that he hopes the biography will 'stimulate my archaeological colleagues and historians to find additional perspectives about her work and life' (xxiii). While *Yucatán through her Eyes* offers a promising start, I share Desmond's hope that it will spur further research on the life and works of Alice Dixon Le Plongeon.

University of Manchester

PATIENCE A. SCHELL

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Matthew Butler (ed.), *Faith and Impiety in Revolutionary Mexico* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, Studies of the Americas Series, 2009), pp. vi + 295, \$84.95; £45.00, hb.

In the three ages into which the history writing of the Mexican Revolution is divided (the amateur, 1920–40; the statist, 1940–68; and the revisionist, dating from the late 1960s), aside from some notable exceptions, the religious conflict has been treated as a question of high-level Church and state relations. However, as the prominent revisionists Alan Knight and Jean Meyer pointed out, this failed to explain the heterogeneity of Catholic resistance. In order to understand this, they recommended