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Institutional Autonomy and Its Consequences

The Middle American Research Institute at
Tulane University

Donald McVicker

Introduction

Biography is one of the challenges that faces the anthropologist attempting to research the history of an institution. This is particularly true if the director of an institute is as flamboyant a character as Frans Blom (see figure 1). This paper will look at the responses of Tulane University and the City of New Orleans to Blom's aims and accomplishments. It will also look at Blom's place among his anthropological colleagues at academic institutions in the Northeast and Middle West. In particular it will compare Blom's Institution with James Henry Breasted's Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago. The paper will argue that it was Blom's lack of understanding of the directions taken by universities, academic departments, and his profession during the 1920s and 1930s that doomed his grand schemes for an Institute of Middle American Research.

Although Blom did not survive at Tulane, the Institute did. Today, its success owes more to its radical change of direction under Robert Wauchope after World War II than to its earlier director's plans and programs. If visitors climb up to the high fourth floor of what was the annex to the science building (renamed Dinwiddie Hall) they will encounter a small museum and director E. Willys Andrews V and his assistant director Kathe M. Lawton carrying out the carefully defined and limited, mission of the MARI. These two are the only full-time employees of the Middle American Research Institute, which at one time under Blom had a staff of nine, and they manage large numbers of graduate students, teach courses, handle publications and curate artifacts. They even find time to help a colleague with designs on their archives.

Foundation

In 1924 the Department of Middle American Research was founded with the optimistic goal of becoming a "University of the Caribbean."

Fig. 1. Frans Blom, date unknown. Photo courtesy Middle American Research Institute, Tulane University.

It was independently chartered, but as part of the University it answered through the President to the Board of Administrators of the Tulane Educational Fund. Since it was not a teaching department its director did not report to a dean. The history of its founding, floundering, and near collapse incorporates the struggles of a university to become a highly respected regional center of academic excellence, the professionalization of anthropology and its casualties, and the significance of teaching and research as it became embedded within an academic framework.

The Tulane University of Louisiana was incorporated in 1883, and its first president, William Preston Johnson, had a dream “to erect a great Southern university, the rival and peer of older institutions in the North and East” (Dyer 1966:40-41). However, the new president’s dream was difficult to realize in the political and social climate of New Orleans at the turn of the twentieth century. Rivalries between Louisiana State University and its challenger to the south, suspicion and dislike shared by upstate legislators and downstate Creoles, and the curious “cosmopolitan provincialism” of the Crescent City on the Mississippi were in-

surmountable roadblocks. The administrators of the Tulane Educational Fund did not conceive of Tulane University as a large regional university, instead in their eyes it was an expression of the values of board members who, according to the bylaws, must be citizens of Louisiana (and generally were from New Orleans). These trustees were “not inclined to be figure heads” (Dyer 1966:152) and directly influenced policies and programs of the University. How much their control of Tulane contributed to the success or failure of directors of the Department of Middle American Research is an open question.

Into this very southern and parochial (and very white and male) world entered Samuel Zemurray, the “banana king,” who would become the chairman of United Fruit. The immigrant son of a Bessarabian Jewish farmer, he lacked an academic background, but was deeply interested in the peoples and cultures of the Central American republics. As early as 1911 he contributed \$25,000, the largest sum received by the University, to establish a Department of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. As his wealth and prominence grew he was appointed to the board of the Tulane Education Fund in 1920 and served until his death in 1961 (Dyer 1966:314, appendix 4). He was encouraged in his activities as university patron by his well-educated and academically inclined daughter Doris, who as Doris Z. Stone became a well-respected student of the Prehispanic cultures of Central America.

The falling fortunes of Americanist William Gates provided the Zemurrays with the opportunity to further advance their interests. Gates was a wealthy businessman who had decided his major mission in life was to collect the best library of original sources in the linguistics and prehistory of Mexico and the Maya. In 1923, having lost a series of clashes with the Carnegie Institution of Washington and S. G. Morley, he was in danger of losing whatever position he had established for himself in Maya studies. Consequently he decided to offer a substantial portion of his library for sale to finance new endeavors.

Word of this impending sale reached Marshall Ballard, editor of the *New Orleans Item*. He was a strong supporter of the university and familiar with Zemurray’s and his daughter’s devotion to Tulane and Middle American studies. Ballard decided to approach Zemurray with a plan to buy Gates’ collection for Tulane. According to Dyer,

[Zemurray] abruptly notified the Tulane administrators that he was buying the Gates Library and was prepared to endow a department at Tulane devoted to the study of Middle America: for Mr. Zemurray was a forceful and direct man of action. If he was

going to do a thing he did it without any shilly-shallying, whether it was overthrowing a banana republic dictator, endowing a department, or peremptorily taking over control of the United Fruit Company. (1966:199)

In addition to his \$300,000 endowment, Zemurray agreed to supply money for an expedition to Central America. The University insisted as part of the package that Gates be hired to head the new department. As Dyer remarks, "Tulane had a department of Middle American Research, but . . . it did not have a very clear notion of what to do with it" (1966:199). Gates, however, knew what to do with it.

Operationalizing the Ideal

Gates conceptualized his new department as a center of research for Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. It would be a clearinghouse of information, and all students desiring to learn about these lands and cultures would turn to Tulane for answers to their questions. As a future "University of the Caribbean," his center would be useful to the Port of New Orleans and a great resource for its businessmen (Gates 1926:27). Prophetically, he predicted that archaeology should not be at the forefront because it was too expensive (Gates 1926:16). The Department's first brochure stated that it had been founded

[f]or the purpose of advanced research into the history (both Indian and colonial), archaeology, tropical botany (both economic and medical), the natural resources and products, of the countries facing New Orleans across the waters to the south; to gather, index and disseminate data thereupon; and to aid in the upbuilding of the best commercial and friendly relations between these Trans-Caribbean peoples and the United States. (Gates? 1925)

It would seem that Gates was destined for success. He had wealth, Southern respectability (although born in Atlanta, he was a scion of the prominent Gateses of Virginia), an international reputation (somewhat tarnished), and a vision that should draw support from the wealthy world of commerce. However, he could not carry out his plans alone and needed to assemble a small staff. In particular, he decided to hire a promising young archaeologist to organize Zemurray's expedition. After several candidates turned him down he went after Frans Blom.

Virtually penniless and pressured to complete his MA at Harvard the adventurous young man from Denmark was tempted by Gates's offer; an

offer which would take him out of the academic world and provide him with the opportunity to spend the maximum time in the field exploring and leading expeditions. After discussions with his friend Morley and his mentor Alfred Tozzer at Harvard, he made the fateful decision to accept the position at the Department of Middle American Research.

His employment officially began on January 1, 1925, but he stayed on at Harvard to complete his degree and arrived in New Orleans February 2. After a few public appearances he set out on his first expedition with budding ethnologist Oliver La Farge as his assistant (see figure 2).

The First Tulane Expedition set the tone for Blom's tenure at the Department of Middle American Research. It was a grand exploration traveling from Veracruz along the southern Gulf Coast and then inland across Chiapas to San Cristóbal de las Casas. From there Blom and La Farge crossed into northwestern Guatemala, passed through Guatemala City and at Puerto Barrios caught a steamer back to New Orleans. Although the expedition's aim was to study "ancient remains, as well as the customs and languages of the Indians" (Blom and La Farge 1926:1), its style was distinctly nineteenth century. Regions were explored; ruins were located and cleared, mapped and photographed; and extensive field diaries were kept. Not surprisingly the two-volume publication based on their diaries, *Tribes and Temples* (Blom and La Farge 1926-27) was dedicated to Alfred Maudslay, the greatest of all nineteenth-century Maya explorers.

Brunhouse (1976:46) concludes that "[Blom] considered himself a pathfinder, searching out unknown remains for later investigators to examine in detail." And Berman (1995:15 n.7) trenchantly observes that this is an apt analogy for Blom's entire career. "He remained unafraid to venture into the unknown. Initially a pioneer in the forest and ruins, and later in the board rooms, museums and universities Blom approach all this work in the spirit of exploration and discovery."

Tribes and Temples is a curious mix of travel adventures and scientific information. It is also an unusual combination of archaeology, ethnology and linguistics. In the preface the authors state,

An attempt has been made to present the material in such a form that the general reader, unacquainted with the history of the ancient inhabitants of Central America, will find it interesting, and at the same time to uphold a standard satisfactory to the scientist. (Blom and La Farge 1926:1)

Unfortunately, this attempt was unsuccessful. The book was never read by the general public to the extent that Blom had imagined. Mainly

Fig. 2. Oliver La Farge, Frans Blom, and “Tata” Lázaro Hernández, 1925. From *Tribes and Temples*, MARI Publication No. 1. Photo courtesy Middle American Research Institute, Tulane University.

it was read by professional and amateur Americanists, who found the mixture of adventure and science less than satisfactory.

The decision to combine archaeology and ethnology in the text was also problematic. Blom contended that many things of interest would be lost if the information were to be split into separate publications, and that it had been decided to “make this report in the form of a book of travel.” Travel books were not what leaders of universities and professional anthropologists had in mind as research publications. As Berman (1995:16) observes, “it was as adventurers and explorers that Blom and La Farge’s accomplishments were noted.”

Daniel Schávelzon (1982:164) in his summary of *Tribes and Temples* for the 1980 “Homenaje a Franz Blom” held in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Mexico, presents a slightly more positive view. He evaluates the volumes as marking a transition between the earlier work of Maler, Maudsley, and Saville and the type of investigation initiated by Morley at Uaxactún and Chichén Itzá. He concludes that it is significant that the book was accessible to the general public and not written for the specialists. Schávelzon (1982:166) also notes that, as far as he knows, this is the first time (and perhaps the only time) that archaeologists list their own guide as a co-author.

At the end of the second volume of *Tribes and Temples* Blom refers to his field research as “scouting expeditions.” He insists that even if ten expeditions could excavate alongside each other in the Maya area, various scouting expeditions would still have to be sent out (Blom and La Farge 1927:449). Unfortunately the Carnegie Institution’s expeditions to the Maya area were proving just the opposite.

Clearly Blom failed to recognize where Americanist archaeology was going. Although well acquainted with “Vay” Morley and the Carnegie Institution’s research program, he showed little interest in excavation or in the multidisciplinary projects that would establish the scientific reputations of his peers.

Blom Takes Command

William Gates did not last long at Tulane, and Blom played a major role in his ouster. Almost from the beginning Gates was suspicious, if not jealous, of Blom’s charming of prominent citizens and warm relationship with President Dinwiddie. He must have felt pressured when, shortly after Blom’s well-publicized return from the field, he received a letter from a Mr. Payne warning that he [Payne] had been “told in a certain quarter there must be no break-up, because if Blom left, there would be a great howl up North, with consequent I-told-you-sos, and a great glee—not to mention complete disruption—I take it—of the entire city of New Orleans” (Gates 1926:46).

On December 10, 1925, Gates’s worst fears were realized. He received a letter of resignation from Blom (Gates 1926:54). In it the young archaeologist complained of the lack of organization in the Department, his inability to conduct research with the Department library, the acts and accusations against him by the Director, and concluded that that his services were not wanted. He also communicated his distress to President Dinwiddie. In the end President Dinwiddie sided with Blom and informed the younger man that he was to take orders directly from him rather than Gates. Enraged, Gates became “obnoxiously critical” of the administrators and was summarily dismissed in March 1926.

With Blom in charge the expeditionary focus continued and the focal point became the Maya. On his most ambitious expedition, the John Geddings Gray Memorial Expedition of 1928, Blom led a team of five for eight months from the southern coast of Chiapas north across mountains and jungles to Chichén Itzá in the north of the Yucatán Peninsula. This expedition yielded little in terms of academic publications. A preliminary report based on field diaries was finally published in 1988 in

San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of Frans Blom's death (Blom 1988).

Blom's lack of concern with publication and scholarly recognition is exemplified by his proposed presentation for the International Congress of Americanists held in New York in 1928. Freshly returned from the field, he wrote to Franz Boas (MARI AF: Boas, F.) in September and proposed showing selections from moving pictures taken on the John Geddings Gray Memorial Expedition. He chose to show such a selection because he believed that "Many of the people who will be present are not acquainted with the nature of the Maya area, or the methods of traveling used on Central American expeditions." His "Trails through the Maya Country," reveal him more as a promoter than a scholar (cf. Dyer 1966:201).

As Blom narrowed his research interest to Maya archaeology, he limited his ability to build a broad base of support for his institution. Although he was to take the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago as his model, he did not have the vision or connections of its founder, James Henry Breasted. Breasted, an Egyptologist, did not conceive of his institution as focusing solely on the ancient Egyptians. He was well aware that an extensive series of research programs illuminating Near Eastern civilizations would have greater appeal to scholars and the public, not to mention charitable trusts.

James Henry Breasted and the Oriental Institute: A Brief Comparison

Since Blom aspired to model his Middle American Research Institute and its funding after James H. Breasted and the Oriental Institute, a comparison of the founding and development of the Oriental Institute with that of the Department of Middle American Research might provide insight into institutional autonomy and its consequences.

James Henry Breasted (see figure 3) was among the first faculty hired in 1894 by University of Chicago president William Rainey Harper. As a professor of Semitic Studies (later of Egyptology and Oriental History, Breasted and Harper shared many intellectual interests in common. Eight years later Breasted presented Harper with a plan for researches in the "Oriental lands themselves" (Breasted 1933:28). His plans were approved by Frederick T. Gates, who served as John D. Rockefeller's de facto agent on the University's Board of Trustees. Following Gates's recommendation Rockefeller contributed \$50,000 and Harper organized the "Oriental Exploration Fund" of the University of Chicago.

Fig. 3. Dr. and Mrs. James H. Breasted, and Charles Breasted at the age of eight, at the ancient temple of Amada in Nubia, Upper Egypt in 1906. Photo courtesy the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

Since Rockefeller was the financial founder and continuous funder of the University, his support was not unexpected. Boyer (2001:23 n.20) notes that from 1902–32 Rockefeller’s General Education Board alone contributed \$18,000,000 to the University. “Total Rockefeller contributions (personal and board/fund driven) to endowment, plant, and general operating funds amounted to slightly over \$76 million.”¹

Following the research hiatus during World War I, Breasted made a successful appeal for funds to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the Armistice. 1919 was to be a banner year for Breasted’s ambitions, for John D. Rockefeller Jr. agreed to support a proposed Oriental Institute for five years at \$10,000 per year. Martin Ryerson, president of the University’s Board of Trustees, provided \$5,000 for the first year, and the Board approved expenditures of \$1,000 for books (Breasted 1933:35). In Breasted’s own words, in the morning mail on May 7, 1919, he received a cordial letter from JDR Jr., stating “he would give \$10,000 a year for five years to support my plans for pure research in oriental science, to maintain in the University of Chicago what I call an Oriental Institute” (JHB PD:7).

The relationship between John D. Rockefeller Jr. (who was also a member of the Board of Trustees) and Breasted was to endure and strengthen through the years. Raymond B. Fosdick quotes JDR Jr. as recalling, “I enjoyed knowing him [Breasted] and seeing him. . . . He was a charming gentleman and a distinguished scholar, with the modesty of the truly great. My interest in archaeology was wholly the result of his influence” (1956:360). In turn, Breasted wrote of “His [JDR Jr.’s] generous and enlightened interest profoundly affected the subsequent program of the Oriental Institute in both Egypt and Asia” (1933:91).

In the heydays of the 1920s hardly a year went past without JHB upping the ante for his Institute and JDR Jr. contributing the funds. For example, in 1924 Breasted received a telegram from Mrs. Rockefeller inviting him to stay at their house before Breasted sailed for Egypt. The evening before he embarked, “Mr. Rockefeller went up to my room with me. He sat down on the foot of my bed and told me with most encouraging assurances of regard that he would continue his support of the Oriental Institute for another five years and at double the old annual budget, vis. At \$50,000 a year” (JHB PD:18).

By 1927 Breasted had developed plans for an \$11,000,000 budget to develop the Institute’s prospects in Science Education and Home Research to be funded by the General Education Board, and in Field Research to be funded by JDR, Jr. His plans included \$1,500,000 for a building to house the Institute. In 1928 the International Education

TABLE 1. The careers of Blom and Breasted: A comparison

	<i>Blom</i>
VISION:	Middle American Research Institute: Interdisciplinary “University of the Caribbean.” “Geology in Relation to Man, Stratigraphy, Archaeology and Technology, Hieroglyphics and Calendar, Ethnology and Physical Anthropology, Maya Linguistics, Spanish Archives and Related Fields.”
RESEARCH:	Primary function. Began with broad program in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean, narrowed to the Maya.
TEACHING:	Resisted. No professorial rank.
BUILDING:	Initially shared space. Failure to separate building.
MUSEUM:	Always shared space. Little systematic excavation or collection. Not for teaching. Decreasing importance.
PUBLICATIONS/LIBRARY:	Strong emphasis. Department of Middle American Research founded on the purchase of William Gates’s library. Moderate Rockefeller support. Failure to integrate into University system.
ADMINISTRATION:	Independently chartered, reported directly to supportive president (Dinwiddie,) and answered to the Board of Directors of the Tulane Educational Fund.
TRUSTEES:	“[The Board of Directors] was “not inclined to be figure heads” (Dyer 1966:152). Zemurray powerful member of the Board.
PATRONS:	Zemurray committed to the University, less so to Blom and Department [Institute]. Wealth couldn’t compare with Rockefeller’s. Overdependence on a single patron.
GRANTS:	Moderately successful. Appeal of Mesoamerican archaeology less than appeal of Classical Archaeology.
PROFESSIONAL POSITION:	Weak, popularizer, adventurer and explorer. MA Harvard, no PhD. Few significant publications.
PERSONALITY:	Unconventional charm.
UNIVERSITY:	Struggling regional University. Closely tied to South and New Orleans. Weak graduate programs and libraries. Little financial flexibility.

Breasted

Oriental Institute: Interdisciplinary, an organization (OI) which will insure assistance of men thoroughly trained “not only in oriental languages and archaeology, in also in physical anthropology, botany, paleontology, geology, meteorology and anthropogeography (Breasted 1933:25).

Research connected to teaching. Science education tied to home and field research. Started with Egypt and broadened to the Near East. By 1919 “the Oriental Institute’s comprehensive program of investigation and correlation of the various civilizations of the ancient Near East was for the first time in full operation” (Breasted 1933:93).

A professor of Semitic studies. The Rockefeller-funded teaching endowment supplemented the Department of Oriental Languages and called to its ranks “other scholars in oriental science who serve both as teachers and as collaborators or directors in research” (Breasted 1933:126). Plans made to hire a Professor of Archaeology and Field Methods. Duties of the new teaching staff to include the development of a new generation of scientists (Breasted 1933:27).

Initially shared space. Achieved separate building. “The orientalist cannot do his work without a properly equipped building, which should be a veritable lab of systematic oriental research, *containing all the available evidence of every kind and character*” (Breasted 1933:26).

Initially shared space. Two small exhibit halls attracted much attention and additional financial support (Breasted 1933:65). “Such collections are an invaluable aid to instruction.” They interest intelligent students and are a real attraction to “friends of the Chicago community” (Breasted 1933:103). From the opening a wide public was interested in the Museum (Breasted 1933:125).

Strong interest, large grants from Rockefeller. Strong emphasis on publication and library. Significant part of the O.I. building (expansive reading room).

Close relationship with president with whom he shared scholarship (Harper). Lack of formal central bureaucracy at the University (Boyer 2000:19). Reported directly to the president’s office. Autonomy.

Close personal relationship with JDR Jr. “[I]t is a firmly established policy of the Trustees that the responsibility for the settlement of educational questions rests with the faculties” (Harper 1903:xiv).

JDR Jr., vast wealth, commitment to the University. Substantial additional support from wealthy Chicagoans.

Extraordinarily successful.

Internationally recognized leader in his field. MA Yale, PhD. University of Berlin 1894. Highly significant professional publications.

Conventional charm. A model gentleman and a scholar.

Rapidly expanding university with a growing international reputation. Exceptionally strong graduate and professional programs. Breasted in step with university’s objectives. Determined to be “the Harvard of the West.” If money could buy it, Chicago would get it!

Board and the General Education Board and JDR Jr. personally responded to his proposal with two substantial contributions. After Breasted escorted the Rockefeller family to Europe and JDR Jr. on a grand tour of the Near East in 1929, the International Education Board made a supplemental appropriation of nearly \$2,000,000. JDR Jr. also decided to assure Breasted a comfortable retirement beyond the University's pension and deposited \$100,000 in a New York bank for Breasted's use (JHB PD:78). It is not surprising that Breasted was humorously referred to as "digging not in Egypt but in Wall Street" (Fosdick 1956:360).

Breasted had all his Institute plans in place just under the line. On April 28, 1930, the ground was broken for the new Oriental Institute building. Breasted records (JHB PD:81) that "In the background stood the steam shovel, and as I write I can hear it already at work." He would move into the building a year later, and preside over its opening and dedication on December 5, 1931.

Even Rockefeller's massive fortune could not withstand the advance of the Great Depression. In 1933 the Foundation reduced appropriation, closed down the International Education Board and "retired" all distinguished-service professors. Ironically, as the Great Depression began it was Blom who devised his grand scheme for his own research institute and approached the Rockefeller Foundation for millions to support his vision.²

Blom's Vision

In 1930 Blom submitted his "Plan for the Founding of a Middle American Research Institute at Tulane University of Louisiana to the Rockefeller foundation (MARI AF: Blom, F.). His plan called for capital of five million dollars and a separately funded headquarters building. The new Middle American Research Institute would be structured around eight sections: Geology in Relation to Man, Stratigraphy, Archaeology and Technology, Hieroglyphics and Calendar, Ethnology and Physical Anthropology, Maya Linguistics, Spanish Archives, and Related Fields (investigations in the country bordering on the Maya field)—all this plus a Section of Headquarters. Blom's Institute would be totally devoted to Maya studies.

Blom did not seem to recognize the special relationship between the University of Chicago and its founder, John D. Rockefeller, and between Breasted and John D. Rockefeller Jr., nor did he seem to recognize the decreasing feasibility of funding vast projects during the Depression. As a result, his hopes were quickly dashed. In a letter from Edmund E. Day, director of the Rockefeller Foundation Social Sciences division), Blom was informed,

Your letter of the 29th leaves me with the impression that I did not make myself altogether clear when we recently discussed your plans for the Middle American Research Institute. The idea which I meant to convey to you at that time did not relate to a step-by-step fulfillment of your scheme for a large institute comparable to the Institute of Oriental Studies at Chicago, but rather to the possibility of satisfactory operations on a much more modest scale. (MARI AF: Blom, F.; Day to Blom, November 17, 1930)

True to his word, Day did support an application to strengthen the Middle American Research Institute's library.

The expansion of the Department of Middle American Research library was one of Blom's few scholarly endeavors that extended beyond the Maya. Throughout his tenure he assiduously sought funds to add to and curate the collection. In 1930 he sent Breasted a proposal to critique, presumably to be submitted to the Rockefeller General Education Board. Overwhelmed by the approaching completion of the Oriental Institute's new home, Breasted essentially turned the matter over to a couple of his subordinates. However, in 1931 Blom did receive a three-year grant of \$15,000 from the Rockefeller Foundation to expand the library and publications. It was renewed for \$27,500 in 1934. In 1936 he received \$17,000 in additional funds from the Foundation for a two-year survey of libraries and archives in Middle America.

In 1933 Blom also applied for a grant to support a specialized journal dedicated to Maya studies. Apparently the Foundation felt it was doing enough supporting his bibliographic project and his application was not funded.

Although Blom experienced some success in building up the Institute's library, he failed to see its place within the larger context of the University. Over the years Blom became increasingly possessive of "his" library and would later fight against President Harris's proposal to consolidate it with other libraries to create a first-class university-wide library system.

Blom was no better at integrating his library and department into the University than he was at integrating himself and his staff into the faculty. As a result his proposed programs at Tulane were only vaguely known by the faculties. Dyer suggests that many important faculty members concluded that "the goings on upon the 4th floor of the science building smacked of the esoteric or the crackbrained" (1966:201).

One thing that was known by the faculties was that neither Blom nor anyone on his staff taught. As Maurice Ries, Blom's editor and later acting co-director of the Middle American Research Institute, recalled in an

interview dated September 22, 1978, there was a “great deal of jealousy because of no teaching at the Department of Middle American Research” (MARI AF: Ries). Ries also notes, “Blom never met most of the faculty,” and comments on the real separation between MARI and the rest of the University. And Berman (1995:34) concludes that “Blom greatly miscalculated the academic community’s interests. Had Blom been more interested in the development of the Middle American Research Institute within the normal teaching faculty of Tulane, the University’s administration might have given more thought to his plans.” Tulane never even listed him as a University professor (Dyer 1966: appendix 7).

Blom was so single-minded about his expeditions, explorations, and library that he even failed to heed the advice of sympathetic professional colleagues. For example, in the collection of letters supporting his application to establish the journal *Maya Research*, Carl Guthe, Director of the Museum of Anthropology at the University of Michigan, encourages him to connect with the University’s graduate programs. Dr. Guthe specifically refers to the location and research facilities of the Department of Middle American Research that “should tend to attract graduate students who seek training in Middle American anthropology. I hope you will soon be able to develop further this function of a research organization” (MARI AF: Rockefeller; Guthe October 9, 1933). However, unlike Professor of Semitic Studies J. H. Breasted, Blom had no interest in teaching or training graduate students.

In 1938, following Blom’s long-awaited change of designation from the Department of Middle American Research to the Middle American Research Institute, he was suddenly confronted with the expectation that the new Institute would offer courses for graduate degrees. Blom was expected to teach, and his staff members feared that they would be replaced by a teaching faculty (cf. Brunhouse 1976:124). In his response to the University’s expectations Blom clearly expressed his reluctance to incorporate the Institute in Tulane’s teaching program:

I have been made to understand that the Department of Middle American Research was founded for the purpose of research, and should only consider teaching as a part of its activities at such time that proper facilities for teaching had been assembled. To me this meant: 1) an adequate research library; 2) a survey of the field through field work; 3) proper museum material for the instruction of the students. (MARI AF: Blom, F.)

Even if these conditions were met, he still felt “that there is a danger about accepting students, insofar as there is a certain amount of romantic

appeal in our kind of work—wherefore students are apt to consider a study in our Institute a kind of snap course.” He then stated that he sees no reason to accept students “until Tulane University has provided suitable courses of preparation” (MARI AF: Blom, F.).

At the end of 1938 Blom and Maurice Ries put together a strategy to protect the Research Institute and his staff from unwanted engagement with the existing Colleges and Graduate School. They proposed three resolutions that, if they could gain Zemurray’s support, would be presented to the Board of Administrators: (1) to make MARI a separate college; (2) to make Blom a dean; and (3) to set up a separate governing Board of Trustees. Their scheme failed.

Teaching as part of the activities of the Middle American Research Institute would have to await the arrival of Robert Wauchope as director. Not a single course in anthropology or Latin American cultures was offered until 1942–43 (ERP: Wauchope 1942–43).

Why should Blom tie himself the University and teaching when it would interfere with his grandiose scheme to make the Middle American Research Institute the equal of the University of Chicago’s Oriental Institute? Although the Rockefeller Foundation had denied funding for his “Plan for the Founding of a Middle American Research Institute,” Blom was already busy hatching another grand project at odds with the times and the directions of the University; if not the Institute with its multiple sections, then why not the headquarters building? After all, Breasted’s new building was the most visible symbol of the successful Oriental Institute.

In early 1930 Blom set off on his last major expedition for Tulane. This expedition would offer him the opportunity to propose a headquarters building for the Middle American Research Institute unlike any conceived at any other United States institution—a reconstructed ancient Maya temple.

The Department of Middle American Research had been selected by the National Research Council to go to the Maya site of Uxmal in Yucatán and “take charge of a minute scientific study of the Nunnery Group, with the purpose of reproducing it in full size and restored to its ancient glory, as a museum for the anthropological section of the Chicago World’s Fair” (ERP: Blom, 1930–31). Blom put together a staff of surveyors, architects, photographers, and sculptors to produce detailed architectural drawings, engineer’s surveys, as well as plaster casts of hundreds of ornaments from the Nunnery Quadrangle to be shipped back for Chicago’s 1933 “Century of Progress” (see figure 4). Although only part of the entire quadrangle was erected, when the Fair was over the

Fig. 4. The Anthropology building at the “Century of Progress” Chicago World’s Fair, 1933. Photo courtesy Chicago Historical Society.

master molds, construction plans, and surveys were donated to Tulane. Now all Blom needed was the land (which he believed Tulane would provide), \$400,000 for the building, and \$150,000 from the University for an endowment fund to maintain the upkeep of the building. Since Rockefeller had failed to support his Institute, he hoped to target the Carnegie Corporation for the \$400,000.

So, in the middle of the Depression, with the University’s finances in a precarious position, with anthropology moving into smaller sustainable projects, and with wealthy patrons all but vanished, Frans Blom became fixated on erecting a structure as colossal as his ego. This fixation contributed to his downfall and nearly brought down the Middle American Research Institute with him.

The Final Debacle

Blom pursued his ideas without regard for the political or economic context necessary to support them (cf. Berman 1995:40). He constantly hammered the administration with requests for a major fundraising drive to erect his headquarters. Board members were unsympathetic and responded that other departments of the University “had needs of more educational value” (Brunhouse 1976:138). To make matters worse, as he began his battle for funds President Dinwiddie had a heart attack in 1934 and died in 1935. The University limped along with acting

presidents until 1937 when Rufus Carrollton Harris, dean of the School of Law, was inaugurated.

President Harris proposed strengthening existing units rather than expansion, strengthening the liberal arts colleges and graduate schools and consolidating libraries. There was little room for Blom's brick-and-mortar expansion in the fiscal hard times of the mid-1930s.

However, Blom thrived on adversity, and in 1935 he expanded his plans. No longer satisfied with the Nunnery as the headquarters for his institute, he had new plans drawn up for a nine level structure based on the Castillo at Chichén Itzá (see figure 5). From his mid-floor office he would survey his domain much as the Carnegie Institution could survey theirs from the top of the Temple of Warriors. The administration remained unimpressed.

Blom's persistence finally wore down the Administration's resistance. In 1939 he received approval to solicit funds for his Maya revival-style temple-headquarters. Zemurray agreed to launch the campaign and act as general chair. A "National Honorary Committee for the Middle American Research Institute" was formed. Blom invited Breasted's successor at the Oriental Institute, Egyptologist John A. Wilson, to join. Wilson graciously consented to lend his name.

The public promotion would feature Blom and his accomplishments. He was to travel around the Northeast and Midwest giving presentations and appealing for funds. Ever hopeful, in March 1940 he traveled to Chicago to show his color film of Middle America and invited the Wilsons to attend. Wilson replied that he and his wife would be out of town.

Unfortunately, it soon became apparent that Blom's abilities as a public speaker were sorely overtaxed. Already a heavy drinker, he began showing up for events in an alcoholic haze.

This was the last straw for the University. Blom's drinking and deteriorating personal life sealed his fate. Blom had not established a critical role for the Institute in the academic life of the University, nor had he worked toward an anthropological presence on campus. Blom was a constant irritant and distraction from the business of guiding the University through times of financial crisis. As Berman summarizes the situation,

It appears that he [Blom] had underestimated the expanding focus on higher education in North America and university training within his own profession. . . . In the end, Blom's miscalculation, and the resulting friction with the direction of the academic establishment in both archaeology and Latin American studies, probably had defeated his building campaign before it even began. (1995:37)

Fig. 5. Plan for a Middle American Research Institute headquarters building modeled after the Castillo at Chichén Itzá, Mexico, c. 1935. Photo courtesy Middle American Research Institute, Tulane University.

It is also possible that some of Blom's tensions with the academic establishment were exacerbated by his lack of a PhD. As anthropology professionalized, universities placed greater importance on the percentage of their faculties holding a doctorate. This was certainly true at Tulane where the number of Arts and Science faculty holding the PhD had increased from 39 percent to 50 percent in the period between 1919 and 1935. Dyer evaluates Tulane's colleges in 1935 as "moderately good undergraduate teaching institutions" (1966:205). He also comments that there was neither a good graduate school nor library and other research facilities to encourage faculty productivity. When President Harris was inaugurated in 1937 this situation would be remedied.

In November 1940 Blom was placed on an "indefinite leave of absence." After a year it was clear that the situation could not be salvaged, and Blom was asked to submit his resignation "for reasons of ill health." It was quickly accepted. As Dyer recaps Blom's career at Tulane, "the blond, personable Dane who did much to popularize archaeological knowledge of Middle America, left the university with the administra-

tive affairs of the Middle American Research Institute in somewhat less than first-rate condition" (1966:273).

Blom also left the collections and museum specimens in considerable disarray. In a memorandum to President Harris, Curator Maurice Ries describes the extreme difficulty he had in responding to Blom's claims that numerous items were his personal possessions. An exasperated Ries informed the administration that "in almost no instance did Mr. Blom preserve adequate records of acquisition of his own or other specimens." (MARI AF: Blom Personal Collection File, November 18, 1941).

In the end, the University settled Blom's claims, paid him \$750, and washed its hands of him. The Middle American Research Institute, under Blom, was a clear case of institutional autonomy gone awry.

Summary

How had it gone so awry? What contributed to Frans Blom's failure to fulfill his plans and establish a sustainable Middle American Research Institute under his direction? Several patterns emerge:

1. *Adapting to the regional setting:* The "cosmopolitan provincialism" of New Orleans offers a challenge to any professional wishing to establish a career in that city. Blom accepted the adulation of his public and enjoyed his Bohemian lifestyle. However, it is doubtful whether he ever fully understood the intricacies of the hierarchical social relations that characterize New Orleans and the Board of Tulane University.
2. *Adapting to the University:* Tulane was seeking to establish itself as a regional Southern university. To do so required that Tulane integrate its colleges, schools, facilities, and faculties. It also required an emphasis on teaching and a reputation for quality that would attract tuition-paying students. Its success was bound to be measured against the standards set nationally, particularly at universities in the Northeast and Midwest. Blom's refusal to align his Institute with the University's goals was his most serious mistake.
3. *Adapting to the professionalization of anthropology:* Blom remained an explorer and "scouter" until the end of his professional life. He appeared to be as concerned with promoting his popular image as with securing his professional standing. His plans remained out of step with the shifting interests of his anthropological peers, and he became increasingly isolated professionally. As Berman observes, "It is evident that Blom saw the expression of his profession's

work to the general public as worthy a pursuit as the research itself” (1995:31). It is also possible that Blom’s disinclination to pursue a PhD may have placed him in a vulnerable position.

4. *Adapting to the development of interdisciplinary programs:* Both Latin American and Mesoamerican studies were at a critical juncture by the end of the 1920s. The designation “Middle American Research” implied a broad scope of scientific investigation appealing to numerous publics. However, Blom’s narrow focus on the Maya belied the trends toward well-designed projects integrating various disciplines. S. G. Morley’s vision of Maya research and the questions he proposed to investigate through comparison of “Old Empire” and “New Empire” stands in sharp contrast to Blom’s nineteenth century–style expeditions.

5. *Adapting to financial exigencies:* Blom never seemed to grasp the impact that the Depression was having on universities and his profession. Patrons disappeared and foundations could no longer justify the vast outlays of funds that characterized grants in the 1920s. As noted above, Breasted’s Rockefeller appropriations were cut. Even Morley’s Carnegie-supported research was sharply curtailed in the 1930s, and his program was not completed until after World War II.

Unlike Blom, his successor, Robert Wauchope, would be quite astute at judging the Middle American Institute’s place within the University and his place within his profession.

Epilogue

After Blom departed, Maurice Ries and librarian Arthur Gropp carried on as co-directors until Robert Wauchope was hired in 1943 to assume the job as director. Not only did Wauchope have solid field experience, proven academic ability, and good connections within the archaeological profession, but in addition he held a doctorate from Harvard and was a native of South Carolina. Equally significant was the fact that he was pleased to accept a joint appointment as a member of the teaching faculty.

Wauchope (ERP: Wauchope, 1942–43) quickly set his goals: (1) to restore the Institute to financial solvency; (2) to integrate the Institute more closely into Tulane including teaching and faculty responsibilities; (3) to overhaul the publication program to improve the quality of the Institute’s monographs; and (4) to complete the renovation of the museum gallery and curtail the acquisition of new specimens. It is significant

that he did not set a goal for the library. As subsequent events would demonstrate, Wauchope was not opposed to President Harris's objective of consolidating Tulane's libraries. From the Director's perspective this would further integrate the Middle American Research Institute into the fabric of the University, and would also resolve some of the space problems that had plagued Blom during his tenure.

When Wauchope returned from World War II to assume active responsibility for Institute affairs he found that he also had to lay to rest the legend of Frans Blom. On the one hand were the faculty perceptions. In a letter to another faculty member in 1948 Wauchope "unleashed his frustration":

[W]hen I first arrived here, faculty members on all sides were full of complaints about the institute: its staff did not teach; they kept their own hours; they did not serve on faculty committees or attend faculty meetings; many doubted the MARI staff's true scholarship; many objected to the lurid publicity that emanated from the pens of Blom and Ries; most faculty members that I talked to said they had no idea of what was even going on in the Institute. (Berman 1995:49)

On the other hand were the perceptions of the townspeople. In the same letter Wauchope "lamented the misrepresentation":

Frankly, I do not expect most townspeople to be impressed by anything less than the spectacular and dramatic news which Mr. Blom manufactured; at a recent party a prominent physician in New Orleans asked me why we had never published on Blom's discovery of a "lost race" or the ruined cities he had discovered. (Berman 1995:49)

Clearly a new age had dawned. With Wauchope's leadership in establishing interdisciplinary Latin American Area Studies and his editorship of the *Handbook of Middle American Indians* he established a firm foundation for a more modest but highly respected professional and academic Middle American Research Institute, well integrated into the fabric of the University.

Notes

In many respects this paper should be co-authored by Daniel S. Berman. Mr. Berman's MA thesis *The Middle American Research Institute: Seventy Years of Middle American Research at Tulane University*, submitted to the Department of Latin American Studies in 1995, served as a guide and a source for much of the documentation used in this paper.

Mr. Berman has graciously given the author permission to use his material. E. Willys Andrews V, current director of the Middle American Research Institute, provided invaluable personal insights as well as permission to use the MARI archives. Without the kind assistance of Kathe M. Lawton, assistant director of the Institute, the author would have been unable to effectively pursue archival research. Since the Middle American Research Institute's Library is now located in the Latin American Library, many of the significant papers covering the earlier years of the Institute are deposited there. Guillermo Nájuez Falcón, former Director of the Latin American Library, and his staff offered very useful assistance and direction. Robert G. Sherer, University archivist, also gave freely of his time. Finally, in New Orleans, Professor Emeritus of Anthropology Munro Edmonson invited me into his home for an invaluable afternoon of institutional history and delightful anecdotes. In Chicago, Oriental Institute Archivist John A. Larson provided access to appropriate papers and publications. I am indebted to all those named.

Following the Hurricane Katrina disaster that struck New Orleans in 2005, E. Willys Andrews V was kind enough to provide me with an update: "Although Tulane was badly damaged by Hurricane Katrina floodwaters, both on the uptown campus and downtown, in the medical complex, the four blocks of the campus nearest the river remained above water. Dinwiddie, one of the three buildings on St. Charles Avenue, escaped rising water. The slate roof, although it has needed extensive repair, held the water out, and none of the collection was damaged. Some water blew in around the old double-hung windows, but we were fortunate" (personal communication, July 24, 2006).

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In citing works in the text the following abbreviations have been used:

ERP	Extracts from Reports to the President
MARI AF	Middle American Research Institute, Administrative Files
JHB PD	James Henry Breasted, Personal Diary

1. A comparison of John D. Rockefeller Jr. and Samuel Zemurray as patrons of Breasted and Blom and their respective universities would probably provide additional insight into the successes and failures of the Oriental Institute and the Middle American Research Institute. However, a discussion of these relationships is beyond the scope of this paper (cf. McVicker 1999).

2. It is interesting to note that George Stocking (1985:140) in his article reviewing the history of Rockefeller funding of anthropology during the interwar period refers to Rockefeller's "antiquarian orientation," and considers him more interested in archaeology "than in other anthropological disciplines." Despite admitting archaeology as an anthropological discipline, Stocking fails to mention Rockefeller's munificent support of the Oriental Institute. Evidently he concluded that the work of Breasted in Classical Archaeology was not a contribution to anthropology as a social science. Breasted might very well agree. On the other hand, Rockefeller's support of Blom's bibliographic project for MARI is duly noted.

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