Charlotte Day Gower (1902-1982): Archaeologist, Ethnologist, or Physical Anthropologist?
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In her compendium on women in American archaeology, Cultural Negotiations, David Browman has described her work with Cole in Illinois in 1926-27, although she might better be remembered as a Caribbeanist on the strength of her published masters thesis. Browman suggests that her M.A. thesis was predominantly a work of archaeology, and Lepowsky points out that she visited collections at "Philadelphia, the Heye Museum, and the Smithsonian (2000:129)." This seems to me an exaggeration. Gower cites Frewes' descriptions of duhos and ceramics and tiles, without engaging in any analysis of her own. The monograph is primarily a work of old-fashioned culture history, citing Clark Wissler as a model and stressing ethnographic comparisons, not material culture. The central claim is for cultural contact between the Gulf Coast, northern South America, and the Antilles. Her work is cited occasionally as diffusionist ideas have regained popularity recently (Keegan et al. 2013:25).

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SOCIANTHROPOLOGIST?

She shifted her focus from Fay-Cooper Cole to Edward Sapir for her dissertation project in 1927-1928. She began her work with Sicilian immigrants in Chicago, learning Sicilian dialect and collecting folktale from 21 informants over a 10 month period. She then won a Social Science Research Council grant to do follow-up work in Milloca, Sicily and was still in the field when she completed her degree in 1928. Her dissertation on Sicilian peasants was lost for many years, depriving her of the place she deserved in ethnology. Lemposky (2000) has stressed its innovative features, arguing that it would have been as influential as Robert Redfield's contemporary dissertation project on Tepoztlán in Mexico, had it been published in a timely fashion. Migliore and colleagues (2009) point out that it was the first ethnographic study of an Italian peasant village, and that her project is much valued today as a document of traditional ways of life. A manuscript was rediscovered at Chicago and published in 1971.

Gower taught briefly at Smith and at the University of Texas before entering graduate school. With Ph.D. In hand, she taught four-field anthropology at University of Wisconsin from 1930 to 1938, returning to Chicago for several short stints. At Wisconsin she was a colleague of W. Redfield and Linton, and she taught physical anthropology, primitive religion, theories of culture, human prehistory, and a number of topics in social anthropology. Sol Tax and Saul Bellow were among her undergraduate students.

After Wisconsin she took a job at Lingnan University in Canton, China. A Presbyterian institution for women, the college was evacuated to Hongkong, where she became dean of women. Gower served as a pharmacist and put her pre-med training to good use in organizing the hospital on the campus. In 1943 the faculty were interned in a POW camp for four months. On her return to the US, she was swept up in World War II, joining the Marines and participating the the organization of the Women's Marine Corps in Washington. She served in the Marine Reserve until 1946, reaching the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Her marine record notes her fluency in French, Italian, and Chinese. She married a Merchant Marine, Saville Chapman, in 1947, and both spent the balance of their lives in government service, joining the O.S.S. in 1944 and the C.I.A. in 1947.


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