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Berthold Laufer

Bennet Bronson



FIG. 9.1. Berthold Laufer.

Berthold Laufer (Fig. 9.1) took his own life in 1934, leaping from an eighth-floor fire escape of the Chicago Beach Hotel in Hyde Park, five miles south of the Field Museum. He left behind more than 450 publications, a superb private library, filing cabinets full of letters, many boxes of notes on works in progress, major collections of artifacts at two museums, and almost nothing about himself. If he was in the habit of writing

letters with personal information in them, these disappeared at the time of his death, along with any diaries or field notes that may have existed. Hence, we know very little about him personally. He is the most enigmatic of the major figures in the history of Field Museum anthropology.¹

He started early. Born in 1874 in Cologne, Germany, to a middle-class Jewish family,² he proved to be a precocious, brilliant student. He entered the University of Berlin in 1893 and received his doctorate at the University of Leipzig in 1897. He concentrated on Asian languages, studying Semitic, Persian, Sanskrit, Malay, Chinese, Japanese, Manchu, Mongolian, Dravidian, and Tibetan. It may be that his necessarily brief studies gave him only moderate familiarity with many of these, but by 1897 he had acquired a fluent reading knowledge of Chinese, Japanese, Manchu, Mongolian, and Tibetan as well as most European languages, including Russian. He could speak many of these, too, and could write well in French and English as well as German. He was 23 years old when he finished at Leipzig. In view of his youth, it might not have been easy to find a job that made use of his spectacular but specialized skills.

Fortunately, he had already come to the attention of the anthropologist Franz Boas, a fellow German of Jewish ancestry who had immigrated to the United States a decade previously. Laufer wrote Boas in April 1896 at the suggestion of his professor, Wilhelm Grube, to inquire about the possibility of joining the project that was to become the Jesup North Pacific Expedition of the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Boas responded favorably and, after exchanging another letter or two, signed Laufer up to be one of eight independent researchers work-

ing under Boas's overall direction in a massive attempt to clarify the nature of early contacts between Asia and North America. Laufer's assignment was to be the southwestern end of the North Pacific arc—Sakhalin Island and the area around the mouth of the Amur River in Siberia. As Sakhalin was part of Russia but closely connected with Japan, Laufer's command of both languages would clearly have been an asset.

Whether Laufer actually visited New York at this point is not clear, but by April 1898 he was in British Columbia waiting for a ship to Yokohama. By early June he was in Japan, buying and shipping an ethnographic collection back to New York, and before the end of the same month he was on Sakhalin. More than a year of strenuous fieldwork on Sakhalin and on the lower Amur ensued, during which he made significant ethnographic collections and gathered much cultural, linguistic, and even physical anthropological data. At that time, the local tribal peoples (Ainu, Nivkhi, and Evenk) had not yet been much affected by Russian culture; few of them spoke Russian or any other European language. The winter climate was harsh, living arrangements were very basic, and travel was limited to open boat, horseback, and reindeer and dogsled. Yet Laufer, never a robust man, seems to have survived these exceptionally rough field conditions. He finished work in Siberia in October 1899, stayed in Japan through January 1900 and was in New York by February or March, apparently in good health.

His Jesup Expedition salary may have ceased at that point. At any rate, there seems to have been little to hold him in the United States. He returned to Cologne, presumably to his family home, in late May 1900 and was still there in April 1901. He may not have returned to New York before being hired once again by the American Museum of Natural History, this time as leader of (and sole participant in) the Jacob H. Schiff Expedition to China (Walravens 1979:144–149).

Arriving in Shanghai in August 1901, he stayed in that city for six weeks and then toured through Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces before proceeding to Beijing, which he reached in December. He stayed in Beijing continuously for almost a year, except for a three-week side trip to Chengde (Jehol) in northern Hebei province. In late November 1902, he began a much longer journey, going first to Shanghai, then by boat up the Yangtze to Nanjing and Wuhan, and then by mule cart to Xian and finally back to Tianjin and Beijing. He arrived in Tianjin in late October 1903 with seven cart-



FIG. 9.2. Berthold Laufer (right) in Hankow, ca. 1904.

loads of ancient pottery and bronze (Fig. 9.2). This time he stayed in the Tianjin-Beijing area for only two months, after which he traveled in Shandong province for six weeks en route to Shanghai, which he reached on February 8, 1904. He left Shanghai in early April, spent the spring and summer in Cologne, and reached New York in the fall.

He had again shown his toughness in coping with difficult field conditions. He seems to have traveled alone, living in a Chinese rather than expatriate world. In a letter written in 1903, he told Boas, "I have come to love the land and people and have become so sinicized ('chinisiert') that . . . I feel myself to be better and healthier as a Chinese than as a European." However, as was also to be true of his trip to China in 1908–1910, his letters and field summaries from this period include very few names of either Western or Chinese individuals whom he met in the field; he evidently was not a social man. He did only limited ethnographic work while in China, mostly focused on drama, music, temple rituals, and popular amusements; otherwise, he spent his time traveling and buying artifacts. By the time he finished, he had acquired a major collection of archaeological and ethnographic material—about



FIG. 9.3. Objects collected by Berthold Laufer in China, 1908–1910.

10,000 objects, plus books, rubbings, photographs and cylinder recordings (Fig. 9.3).

Shortly after his return from China in 1904, he was put on the American Museum of Natural History's regular payroll for the first time, receiving the title "Assistant in Ethnology." In 1905–1907 he was also a lecturer in anthropology and (from 1906) in Eastern Asiatic languages at Columbia University. Under the guidance of Boas, the museum and university had both become leaders in the developing field of academic anthropology. However, neither had a strong interest in Laufer's brand of historical, artifact- and text-focused research. A lack of intellectual support and decreasing interest in Asia on the part of the American

Museum of Natural History led Laufer to consider a change of employment.

His chance came in 1907. In June of that year, he met George Dorsey in New York and suggested assembling a Tibetan collection for the Field Museum. In November 1907, he accepted Dorsey's offer of the position of assistant curator of Asiatic Ethnology. His new employers promptly endorsed Laufer's Tibetan suggestion and asked him to carry out a three-year expedition to be funded, to the tune of \$40,000, by Mrs. Timothy B. Blackstone, the wife of a Chicago railway magnate. Tibet was to be the chief objective of the Blackstone Expedition. While Laufer would be buying Chinese and Tibetan books for the



FIG. 9.4. Tibetan temple brass lamp.

Newberry Library and the Crerar Library (now at the University of Chicago), the rest of his budget and time were to be spent on acquiring Tibetan and “Lamaist” materials for the Field Museum (Fig. 9.4). He was to be leader and only member of the expedition.

Laufer’s first attempt to enter Tibet was from the south and was unsuccessful. Although he waited at Darjeeling for more than two months, he could not get the British colonial government’s permission to proceed to Lhasa. He did manage to buy 634 Tibetan objects from traders in Darjeeling and Sikkim, which he shipped back to the Museum from Calcutta before leaving for China by sea (Fig. 9.5).

He was in Beijing by August and stayed there until the end of January of the next year, buying Tibetan and Chinese objects. In August or September 1908, he took a three-week side trip to Japan in order to look for old editions of Chinese books. Dorsey came to Beijing for a brief visit in late October, when Laufer seems to have convinced him to use a significant part of the Blackstone money for buying more Chinese antiquities. By late December, Laufer was packing up his new Chinese acquisitions: 413 pieces of pottery, 68



FIG. 9.5. Teapot of tin-lined, partially gilt copper collected in Darjeeling India, 1980–1910. Chinese work, Tibetan, of the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. The relief picture in the medallion represents the Rasien.

ancient bronzes, 89 ancient bronze mirrors, 89 “nonreligious” paintings, and 112 other objects (including three stone rubbings). He finally left for Tibet on January 28, 1909. He reached Taiyuan in Shanxi province on January 30, Xian in Shaanxi province on February 20, and Chengdu in Sichuan province on April 12. He acquired a good many more Chinese objects during his three-week stays in Xian and Chengdu: 1,759 pieces from the former and seven cases of specimens from the latter. In Chengdu he also bought supplies and horses for his onward journey to Tibet.

Traveling through Tibetan-speaking western Sichuan province, he reached the border of Tibet itself at Chamdo in early July 1909. There once again he was turned back. Chinese government officials, like their British counterparts in Darjeeling, refused to allow Laufer to enter Tibet. Forced to return, he did manage to buy a quantity (“25 large cases”) of Tibetan objects but was clearly discouraged by the time he arrived at Songpan, back in the Chinese-speaking part of Sichuan, in November. During the next two months he seems to have lost interest in visiting

any more Tibetan areas. Going first northward to Lanzhou in Gansu province, he considered and rejected the idea of going to the Tibetan monastery of Kumbum in the west, instead turning east toward Xian. He reached that city in February 1910, where he bought 1,100 of "the choicest Chinese antiquities." Three months later he was in Beijing. He left China in November, was in Cologne by December, and was back in Chicago by January 1911, with approximately 8,000 items for the Museum plus two good collections of Tibetan books for the Crerar and Newberry Libraries.

Reading between the lines of his letters, he had not enjoyed his field experiences as much as those six years previously. His visit to the Tibetan-speaking part of Sichuan seems not to have been at all enjoyable—not only did he never write about it, but he even turned away from Tibetan studies, writing less and less about Tibet in later years. He may not have liked rural China all that much, either. His letters contain fewer comments than in 1901–1904 about the pleasures of the simple country life and the virtues of the peasantry. Significantly, he was never to do fieldwork again in undeveloped rural areas, in or outside China. During his only other trip to Asia, in 1923, he spent most of his time in big cities.

In these two collecting trips to China for the Field Museum, Berthold Laufer acquired about 19,000 archaeological, historical and ethnographic objects made or used by Han Chinese, spanning the period from 6000 B.C. to A.D. 1890. His acquisitions included about 1,500 textiles, 5,000 rubbings of stone inscriptions, 2,000 archaeological objects, and 10,000 utilitarian and decorative objects of the eighteenth to twentieth centuries. Well-known and often studied subcollections include some 400 stone and glass snuff bottles, 130 rhinoceros horn cups, 500 puppets, 1,000 jade carvings, 30 early cast iron objects, 500 items of fifth- to seventeenth-century Daoist and Buddhist sculpture, 400 Han dynasty ceramics, 230 pewter objects, more than 300 prints and posters, and 300 items of pet equipment, mostly for pigeons and crickets.

Laufer also acquired significant Tibetan holdings, counted separately from the Chinese. These comprise approximately 4,000 secular and religious objects, mostly from Beijing and the Tibetan-speaking parts of western Sichuan province. Nearly all date from the seventeenth through the nineteenth century. Highlights include more than 1,000 traditional Tibetan books (both woodblock

printed and handwritten), 850 costumes and personal accessories, 800 bronze ritual containers and images, and 350 Tibetan religious paintings, or tangkas.

Laufer's 1911 return to Chicago marked a major change in his life, which henceforth became more sedentary and stable. He was promoted almost immediately to associate curator, which not only carried increased status in a department where many staff were simply "assistants" but also meant he had at least some financial security. However, he was bored. As he wrote to Boas in July 1911, "I am becoming mummified for lack of intellectual stimulation; there is not a trace of intellect here" (quoted in Walravens 1979:xxxiv; other curators at time included George Dorsey, A. B. Lewis, Charles Owens, and Stephen Simms). His answer was to immerse himself in museum work and to push up his already high rate of publication. In 1912, he published 16 books and articles; in 1913, 20; and in 1914, 14. He became curator of the Department, the equivalent of a modern department chairperson, in 1915, but his new responsibilities did not affect his productivity. He continued to produce between 10 and 20 books, articles and reviews annually down through the year of his death in 1934.

Perhaps because of the outbreak of World War I, which cut off scholarly communication with most of Europe and caused German-Americans to reexamine their own loyalties (Walravens 1979:xxxiv), Laufer seems to have reconciled himself to living in the Midwest. His bitter diatribes against life in Chicago ceased as he came to know more people who treated him with respect, if not understanding. By 1914–1918 he was socializing with a number of upper-class collectors, including Charles Freer in Detroit and various Chicagoans: Lucy Driscoll, Russell Tyson, Kate Sturges Buckingham and Lucy Maude Buckingham, and Edward and Louise Sonnenschein. None of these individuals was closely, if at all, associated with the Field Museum. In later years he was to be on friendly terms with an international cast of elite collectors, dealers, and museum curators, including A. W. and Peter Bahr in Shanghai, Alfred and Louise Pillsbury in Minneapolis, Ralph Chait in New York, C. T. Loo in Paris, Shigejiro H. Yamanka in Tokyo and Boston, Arthur Upham Pope in Iran, Langdon Warner of the Fogg Museum at Harvard, Benjamin March in Detroit, and George Eumorfopolous in London. He was also closely associated with a number of art- and culture-oriented Chicago institutions: adviser to the

Arts Club of Chicago, president of the American Friends of China, honorary curator at the Art Institute of Chicago, and a founding member of The Orientals, a support group for the Art Institute (Pearlstein 1997:259).

Whereas many of these activities did not greatly benefit his own museum, other museums and collectors not only benefited but paid him a good deal of money. He sold pieces from his private collection—for instance, two paintings to Charles Freer in 1912 for the then-considerable sum of \$600 (Laufer-Freer, December 8, 1912; Freer-Laufer, January 1, 1913). In the 1930s, his standard fee for appraising jades, in which he was the leading Western expert, was \$500 per day (Henry Field, in Walravens 1979:xxv). This may or may not have been winked at by the Field Museum: after all, he was becoming famous and thus at risk of leaving for another job.

Astonishingly, the Museum's indulgent attitude may even have extended to allowing Laufer to help the Art Institute of Chicago acquire Asian collections from Chicago-area donors like Tyson, the Sonnenscheins, and the Buckingham. These were the people who laid the foundations for the Art Institute's world-class Chinese and Japanese holdings, and this was done not only with the assistance of Laufer but virtually under his direction. To keep this a secret would have been impossible—upper-class Chicago was a small world then, and the Field Museum, in the person of Stanley Field, its president, held a central position within that world. We can only assume that Field had decided, for some reason, not to interfere. Perhaps he felt that Asia was big enough for two Chicago museums.

Laufer had previously purchased objects for private collectors during museum expeditions; for instance, he had collected ceramics for Mrs. Robert DeForest of New York, with the approval of the American Museum of Natural History, in 1903–1904. He did so again on his last trip to China, the Captain Marshall Field Expedition, in 1922–1923, when he collected pewter objects for Edward Everett Ayer, a long-term benefactor of the Museum (see Ayer, this volume; Dorsey, this volume). He also carried out some private commissions that he did not mention in his report. One example was a group of Zhou period (seventh century B.C.E.) bronze fittings that he bought in Shanghai and then sold to Kate Buckingham when he got back (Pearlstein 1993:39). She donated the fittings to the Art Institute in 1924.

Another possible example of Laufer's acting as

an agent or even a principal was in connection with an imperial throne screen (Fig. 9.6) given to the Field Museum in 1926 by the Arts Club of Chicago. The screen had been purchased by the Arts Club in the same year from an obscure Chicago importer named Hague, who, surprisingly, knew enough about Chinese art to be able to tell the Arts Club that the screen came from Qianlong's palace but may have been made earlier, in the Ming period (Anthropology Department Accession Files, No. 1671). This screen definitely came from one of the imperial palaces, probably from the Forbidden City in Beijing. We know that Laufer did buy a number of imperial objects while in Beijing in 1923 and that he did "not wish to have it publicly known that most of these treasures emanate from the imperial palace" (Laufer-Davies Correspondence 1923:11). It seems plausible that it was Laufer himself who bought the screen in Beijing, shipped it to Chicago, and sold it through Hague, who would have been acting not as a principal but as an agent for the deal. True, Laufer had sold the fittings to Miss Buckingham directly, but clearly such openness would not do when an object was to be donated to the Field Museum. Selling through an agent, if that is what happened, avoided a good deal of embarrassment.

The Captain Marshall Field Expedition was a quick affair devoid of the hardship of earlier journeys. Laufer left Chicago on April 20, 1923, and reached Shanghai on May 20. His formal report on the expedition (Laufer-Davies 1923) contains lengthy explanations why he could not visit most of the cities on his original itinerary: Xian and Fuzhou were too dangerous, provincial governments were rapacious, provincial cities were expensive and stripped of antiquities, bandits were everywhere, and so forth. He writes that therefore he decided to concentrate on Beijing and Shanghai, which were at that time "not only the centres for the trade in antiquities but also the emporiums for all goods manufactures throughout the empire." He stayed in Shanghai for a month and then went on to Beijing. He spent the next ten weeks in that city, taking several short excursions to nearby places and a longer four-day trip with the American ambassador to view the Buddhist cave-temples at Yungang before returning to Shanghai in late August. His six weeks there were broken by one- and two-day train trips to the ancient cultural capitals of Hangzhou and Suzhou. He left Shanghai on October 4, having purchased about 1,800 artifacts. Perhaps by then there was not



FIG. 9.6. Imperial dragon screen from the K'ien-lung period. Lacquer and wood.

much left for him in Germany, for he returned directly to the United States without stopping to see family and friends in Cologne.

He seems to have been more socially inclined on this trip than on his previous ones. The fact that he was no longer an obscure young researcher certainly helped. As he says in his report to Davies, not too modestly, "the fact that fame is a curse was illustrated by numerous invitations pouring in from universities, colleges, scientific organizations and clubs with request to deliver addresses." He declined most of the hospitality offered by expatriate Westerners but did accept gratefully the help of the Eurasian business elite and various Chinese intellectuals and collectors.

His dealings with wealthy Chinese collectors in Shanghai brought out all of his latent Sinophilia. Whereas he was struck by the "shocking conceit and coarsure judgment" of Western collectors, he felt that their Chinese counterparts, although often enormously wealthy and powerful, were distinguished by an almost excessive sense of modesty and finesse coupled with an extreme simplicity and charm of manner. He goes on to say that

I was filled with admiration for all these men, not so much because they had generously given me the opportunity of acquiring new knowledge and esthetic enjoyment, but because of their wonderful and inspiring personalities. I reflected that a country which produces such perfect types of humanity

as the result of a many thousand years old civilization and social training can never be lost, and that is it just such types of men who are the true index of the degree of a nation's civilizations. (Laufer-Davies Correspondence 1923)

While his letters to Boas during these years were no longer so frank about his disdain for American and European culture, there can be little doubt that he still felt that way. As far as is known, he never considered moving to China, and this one later visit to China was very short. Yet he continued to feel that Chicago, and the West in general, was shallow and vulgar. This paradox, of wishing he were Chinese but not liking China very much, was a leading motif of Laufer's life.

The last decade of his career at the Field Museum saw him famous, still committed to research and writing, but much distracted by his duties as curator of the Department of Anthropology:

A poor administrator, he encouraged each of his Curators and Assistant Curators to interrupt him if they needed assistance of any kind. . . . The telephone rang constantly, often with silly questions from librarians, students or newspapers. Correspondence was often just as bad. . . . In addition to [these] interruptions, Dr. Laufer discussed with his Staff the cataloguing and installation of exhibits, checked each label before it went to the Museum printer, examined temporary layouts for exhibits in the huge workroom, visited storage rooms, etc. (Henry Field, in Walravens 1979:xxi)

Laufer was also spending more time on his private business. Between 1924 and 1934, he catalogued or helped to organize a number of commercial exhibitions of Oriental art. From Walravens's bibliography (1979, 1:xxii-lxxx) and Pearlstein's archival research (see Pearlstein 1997), it is clear that Laufer was involved in the following for-sale exhibitions: for "various collectors" in Paris and Brussels in 1924, for Jan Kleykamp Gallery in New York in 1925, for Herbert Devine in Chicago in 1928, for Frederick Peterson in New York in 1930, for C. T. Loo and Co. in Chicago in 1931 (also in 1922 and 1926?), for Ma Chang Kee at Ralph Chait Gallery in New York in 1933, for Parish Watson and Co. in New York in 1934, and for S. H. Yamanaka and Co. in Chicago in 1934. Together with his work as an appraiser and adviser to collectors, these activities took up a good deal of time. Henry Field's memoir (Walravens 1979, 2.1:xxv) says that Laufer confined his commercial work to his annual three-week vacation, but this is evidently not true. The few private business letters preserved in the Museum ar-

chives, especially Laufer's correspondence with Alfred Pillsbury in 1930-1931, make it clear that he worked as an adviser and appraiser throughout the year.³

In spite of all this, he continued to do research and to publish, maintaining an admirable level of productivity throughout his career. By now he had become internationally known in three partially distinct fields: museology, anthropology, and text-oriented Asian studies.

As a museum curator, he should be credited with personally acquiring about 13,000 Chinese, Tibetan, and Japanese artifacts, plus several thousand more traditional books and rubbings, and with persuading donors to present a good many more artifacts. As department head, he was responsible for overseeing the moving of the full anthropology collections when the Field Museum itself moved from Jackson Park to Grant Park in 1919-1922 and for supervising the reinstallation of more than 100,000 square feet of anthropology exhibition space. As curator of the Asian collections, he had general responsibility for two major Southeast Asian halls that had been curated by Fay-Cooper Cole until his departure in 1923 and sole responsibility for several permanent exhibitions: Chinese archaeology and ethnology, Tibetan culture, and jade. The Chinese and Tibetan halls were reinstalled three times during Laufer's tenure at the Museum, first in 1911-1912 after his return from China, then in 1919-1922 after the move from Jackson Park to Grant Park, and lastly in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Covering some 15,000 square feet, tightly organized and densely labeled, these halls represented an extraordinary intellectual effort for a single individual. No other Asian exhibit in the world contained as much authoritative information. And it may be that no other exhibit of any kind, inside or outside the Field Museum, attempted as successfully to represent the views of the cultures that made the artifacts on display. Even Boas at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, despite his ardent advocacy of cultural relativism, could hardly match Laufer in the conviction that native cultural achievements were as worthy of respect as our own and that native opinions on meaning, authenticity, and age should be considered definitive.

As an anthropologist, Laufer had studied briefly under the German ethnologists Adolf Bastian and Felix von Luschan, worked under the direction of Franz Boas, and spent more than a year doing fieldwork among tribal peoples in eastern Siberia. While these anthropological credentials were re-

garded as sound enough for him to be made head of the Field Museum's anthropology department, he was in fact somewhat outside the mainstream of the field. Formal and introverted, he could not have greatly enjoyed the company of his fellow anthropologists, who in those days, as now, were a relatively casual and extroverted lot. He may have known George Dorsey better than any other anthropologist except Boas, having been hired by Dorsey, having traveled with him in India and China, and having been his subordinate for eight years. Yet Laufer did not like Dorsey much. In a letter to Boas in 1908, Laufer comments on Dorsey's "downright shocking superficiality" and a few months later writes patronizingly that he envies Dorsey's "enthusiasm and half-childish joy in all things."

He does not seem to have tried to involve other anthropologists in East Asian research; as far as is known, he never promoted or gave his blessing to a single anthropological field project in China, Japan, or Korea. His judgment of young anthropologists was good—while head of the Field Museum's anthropology department, he chose and hired such anthropological stars as J. Alden Mason, J. Eric Thompson, Ralph Linton, and Paul Martin. (Other, lesser-known anthropologists employed by the Museum at the time include Helen C. Gunsaulus, Wilfrid Hambly, Henry Field, William M. McGovern, and William Duncan Strong.) And yet very few of these or other anthropologists seem to have been collaborators or friends. His surviving professional correspondence is almost entirely to and from historians, philologists, collectors, and art historians; the only anthropologists with whom he corresponded at all regularly were Clark Wissler of the American Museum of Natural History, with whom he exchanged about 25 terse notes on museum business, and Franz Boas, to whom he wrote and received more than 344 letters.

As a Sinologist, a specialist in Chinese (and Tibetan) culture, Laufer was a dominant figure but equally isolated. In the words of one China specialist, "During most of his life, America had no sinologists who could equal him in his acquaintance with the languages and in his prodigious learning in the pre-nineteenth century culture [of eastern Asia]" (Latourette 1936:55). He knew far more about this subject than his peers at other North American or European museums. In Europe, one of his few equals for linguistic ability and knowledge of Asian cultures was the French Sinologist Paul Pelliot, who served as an adviser

to the Musée Guimet. In American museums before the 1930s, only Kazuo Okakura at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts could read Chinese nearly as well as Laufer, and even American universities had no one who knew as much of that language. And yet he seems not to have fit comfortably into the ranks of American Sinologists, either.

Part of the problem may have been the strong missionary orientation of Asian studies in the United States. Laufer did not feel that the "wretched, hypocritical Christian religion" had benefited China (Laufer-Boas Correspondence, December 4, 1903), and he did not have a high opinion of missionaries. He felt especially strongly about the American variety, "the worst under the sun for unpleasantness and wickedness. If I were a Minister in Peking, I would let the whole outfit be murdered in a single Bartholomew's night. That alone could remove the guilt and responsibility from unlucky China" (Laufer-Boas Correspondence, September 18, 1902).

Another part of the problem was Laufer's broadly cultured background and an intolerance of those who did not share that background. Trained in a tradition that emphasized history, languages, and the arts, he did not share his sinological colleagues' narrow focus on contemporary economic and political issues: "He could never quite adjust himself to the American outlook nor free himself from a certain impatient disdain for it." (Latourette 1936:55). This may have contributed to the harshness of his reviews and criticisms, which contemporary biographers all mention (Creel 1935-1936:488; Hummel 1936: 103; Latourette 1936:55).

A third part of the problem was alienation. Laufer did not like Chicago all that much and disliked New York, or at least the American Museum of Natural History, where "the fossil rhinoceroses have not yet become extinct" (Boas-Laufer Correspondence, 1914). He did not like Germany, either. In 1917, he wrote an article titled "Germany Needs a Thorough Defeat." While the article could not have endeared him to his German colleagues, the fact that he felt he had to write it shows that he was insecure in his American identity as well. In his letters to Boas, the only place he wrote about with genuine enthusiasm was China: "Chinese culture is in my opinion as good as ours and in many things even better, above all in its practical ethics. . . . If I regret anything, it is the fact that I was not born Chinese." And yet, as pointed out above, he returned to China only

once after 1910 (in 1923), and that was for a stay of less than five months.

Thus, Laufer comes through to us as something of a misfit who, in spite of his prodigious talents, had few friends, no collaborators, and only a handful of intellectual successors. All those successors were sinologists, including Robert van Gulik and Edward Schaefer, both of them also brilliant scholars who were mavericks within their field. No anthropologists chose to follow him; one gets the impression, in fact, that the only young anthropologists he knew were the junior curators working in his department. Yet it could be argued that in museology he did have a lasting influence. American museums now are outstanding among the world's museums for their wholehearted adoption of the approach that Laufer exemplified: that of listening carefully to the voices of those whose heritage is on display and teaching visitors to see an artifact in the same light as its maker. Back in the 1910s and 1920s, most Western museums were patronizing in their approach to all non-Western art. This was even true of the Field Museum with respect to most of its exhibits, but not with respect to China: there, Laufer's warm admiration shone through his dry, didactic label style. He was a pioneer in discarding the old Western ethnocentrism that even now infests museum exhibits. Modern museum professionals still can learn from him in that regard.

Laufer's suicide was definitely due to cancer and not overwork. Henry Field says that it was the sculptor Malvina Hoffman, with whom Laufer "shared a mutual admiration and respect," who finally persuaded him to undergo surgery in 1934 (Field 1979). He went to Cleveland for the operation. Three weeks later he returned, weakened and depressed. Shortly afterward, he killed himself. Perhaps his depression was not solely because of his cancer. His letters show him to have often been gloomy and sensitive, a driven worker with few relaxations, and, except for his wife, Bertha, about whom we know little, and Boas, no

one to tell his troubles to. Yet his was an extraordinary mind: the greatest in his field then, and one that has had few equals since. One is happy to know that many of his contemporaries recognized this and that Laufer felt pleasure in that recognition.

Notes

1. This chapter is based mainly on Laufer's field letters and reports as preserved in the Field Museum's archives, notes on Edward and Louise Sonnenschein and Kate Buckingham assembled by Elinor Pearlstein of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Laufer-Freer correspondence kept at the Freer Gallery, and the extensive documentation, including the Boas-Laufer correspondence, reprinted by Walravens (1976, 1979) in his definitive four-volume work, *Kleinere Schriften von Berthold Laufer*.
2. The Field Museum's Laufer archives include a program of the celebration of the 50th wedding anniversary of his paternal grandparents, Salomon and Johanna Laufer, held at a synagogue in Krotoschin in Prussia, now Poland (Walravens 1976:cxxx). It is unclear whether Berthold's parents, Max and Eugenie Laufer, were practicing Jews as well. Berthold himself was not religious.
3. Proof that Laufer usually kept his business correspondence separate from his museum correspondence and that his copies of the former were subsequently destroyed comes from Elinor Pearlstein, who found 62 letters between Laufer and the Detroit collector Charles Freer in the archives of the Freer Gallery in Washington. Although a number of Laufer's letters to Freer are on Field Museum letterhead, there are no copies in the Field Museum's own archives. Laufer was advising Freer about his collection, presumably for a fee.