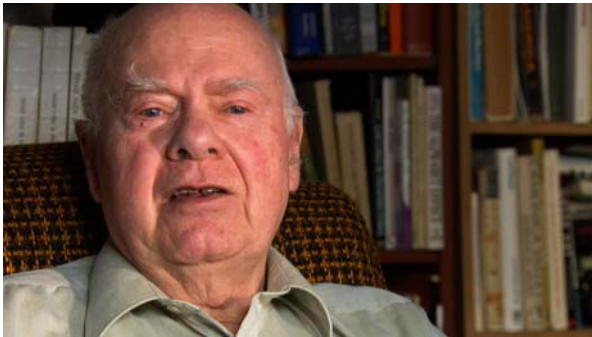


DAVID H. KELLEY

Interviewed April 18 2005 at his home in Calgary, Canada



Canadian archaeologist and epigrapher [David Kelley](#) made major contributions to the Maya decipherment. He was one of the first Western advocates for Yuri Knorosov's evidence for phoneticism in the Maya script, and the first to apply Knorosov's theories to the stone inscriptions. He is the author of the 1976

Deciphering the Maya Script, at the time the authoritative summary of the state of the field, and more recently co-author with Eugene Milone of *Exploring Ancient Skies: An Encyclopedic Survey of Archaeoastronomy* He taught for many years in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Calgary, where he is now Professor Emeritus.

In this interview he discusses:

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Interview transcript

(Excerpts only)

Some early figures in the history of the decipherment

Ernst Förstemann:

Förstemann was the person who opened up the idea that the Maya were capable of doing, I suppose you could say, elegant astronomy. I don't know that anyone else was thinking of it in quite those terms.

Hermann Beyer:

...And so he proceeded to cut up Morley's drawings without telling Morley that he was doing so. Later, Morley asked him 'Why did you do it with out asking me?' and Beyer said, "Well, I didn't think you'd give me permission." Which was of course entirely true. Even at that time it would have been possible to take photographs of these and cut up the photographs, but this didn't occur to Beyer. And his interest in the intellectual problem overrode any ethical scruples he might have had in using these things in this way. But he did make some remarkable studies of the parallels between passages on different monuments at the site of Chichén Itzá and to show that there were sequences. One of the sequences which appeared frequently, it was in fact the single most common sequence I believe, was one which I was later able to read on the basis of material by Yuri Knorosov, and interpretations, as giving the name of Kakupakal, who was a famous leader of the Itzas who gave their name to Chichén Itzá. So this seemed like a remarkable thing and it was certainly much easier because of Beyer's work. And Beyer had this tremendous amount of material.

Eric Thompson:

And, basically at the time he was one of those elegant gypsies that the British Empire occasionally turned out. In some ways he had a certain similarity to Maudslay, but he never had Maudslay's doubts about anything. He was an extremely assured individual; he was however capable of changing his mind.

Eric, I think, was among the more difficult persons I have known. He could be very helpful. When I met him, he was perfectly willing to talk with me and to argue with me, though he wasn't necessarily willing to pay much attention to me, which wasn't quite the same thing.

Tania Proskouriakoff:

Tania was a lady, and this is important at a lot of levels. She was born in Tula, in Russia, not the other Tula. Or at least this was what we were given to understand, although I think that subsequent research has shown that while her family was associated with Tula, she wasn't actually born there. But, anyhow, she was born, she spent some time there when she was very young, and then her family fled to Philadelphia, and she worked in Philadelphia, and she got to be associated as an artist with Linton Satterthwaite. And Linton was one of the most open people in archaeology at the time. Archaeology by and large at that time was a male elite. It was practiced by people who were, um... I think that the best way to put it is, they didn't have to make a living. I'm not saying that some of them didn't, but they were people who had had substantial financial backing for things that they wanted to do.

The Carnegie Institution:

But, unfortunately we got an idiot who thought that atomic science and the military were more important than Mayan archaeology, and Vannevar Bush, as far as I was concerned, wrecked the Carnegie Institution. There were others who felt that he did well by it, but I think they were all making a gross misjudgment.

I liked to go over to the Carnegie, and it was primarily to go talk with Tania. It wasn't to talk with Eric Thompson. And Tania had ideas, and she was willing to argue those ideas and she was willing to explain those ideas, and we continued in frequent and regular contact --When she was writing the Piedras Negras paper I had already started my work on the book that ultimately became "*Deciphering the Maya Script*," and I had a chapter notation, something about dynastic rulers or something, and I think it had to do with Copán. But I in fact had virtually no data. Tania had precisely analyzed, carefully thought out, she was a precise thinker....

...After I left Cambridge, and whenever I got back there I'd go see Tania, and we would frequently have lunch or dinner together. Sometimes we'd go out, sometimes at her place. And we would argue. And Tania enjoyed arguing in a ladylike way. She did not enjoy anything that she didn't regard as ladylike.

His meeting with and correspondence with Yuri Knorosov

I was lucky enough to be able to go to the Congress of Americanists in Copenhagen because I was in Britain on other matters. I was particularly interested in some of the sessions. I knew about Heyerdahl and I wanted to meet Heyerdahl because of his interest in the Pacific, and he and I had had some correspondence, and I was excited at the prospect of hearing what he had to say. And there was this chap on the program named Yuri Knorosov, and Knorosov was a small, Mediterranean sort of person in his appearance. He didn't look at all as I thought Russians were going to look. And my stereotype was not vindicated. But anyhow, he and I talked together and we talked a lot, always in Spanish. And this had the curious affect of leaving two wandering Spaniards to the conclusion that we were probably spies talking to one another. But anyhow...

I'm not sure whether I had heard one item before, or not. I've been trying to think about that. I wasn't sure whether I knew of Knorosov, or whether I met him there. But certainly as the two people interested in the decipherment of Maya, we were in immediate contact to the extent that it was possible, considering the fact that we both spoke atrocious Spanish and it was our only common language. However, he and I did spend a lot of time communicating in our atrocious Spanish and pointing at glyphs. And between the glyphs and the Spanish, we managed to get along.

Anyhow, at one point he and I were standing in front of the City Hall and a couple of Spaniards who were touring Northern Europe, and hadn't heard any Spanish all the time since they left Spain, came up to us. They were delighted to hear Spanish again, even if it was such bad Spanish. And I introduced myself and they were delighted to meet me and very pleased and here an American in Copenhagen and so on. And then I introduced my friend Dr. Knorosov from Leningrad, and their jaws dropped and they immediately looked entirely horrified and left as hastily as they possibly could. And you could see that they were absolutely convinced that they had stumbled on some great spy plot which required people to speak Spanish because they were communicating about all these things that they didn't want the Danes and the Germans and the English to understand.

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Let me say one thing first about the Copenhagen meeting, that they had the most elegant banquet that I have ever had or seen in my life. And I have been to a number of Congress of Americanists meetings since, and they're mostly anywhere from mediocre to atrocious. But this was a wonderful banquet. They had a rooster in ice cream that was about three feet high. Knorosov and I both had substantial amounts of rooster!

Anyhow, I got back to Cambridge and there was a group which we called the Mesa Cuadrada at Harvard. And the Mesa Cuadrada met, and we talked about matters dealing with ancient Mesoamerica. And I told them about the ideas that Yuri Knorosov had, and explained certain items that I thought were extremely convincing. And of course Mike Coe was there and Tania was there. And we talked about this. Tania included some of Knorosov's ideas in her Piedras Negras paper. And I think actually it was not only the first published mention of dynastic matters, but it was also the first published mention of certain possible phonetic readings which she thought were probably correct.

Knorosov himself was interested in ancient scripts. As was I. Knorosov worked on the Indus script, he worked on the Easter Island script, and he worked on the Maya script. He probably worked on others I don't know much about. But those, I actually knew something of the publications. And Knorosov was writing of course in Russian, and I couldn't read Russian, but Mike Coe, after he married Sophie, why, Sophie spoke Russian, and of course Tania read Russian, and Floyd Lounsbury, who was not known to me at that time, also read Russian, and he had followed Knorosov from a date prior to the time that I did, and presumably he found the sorts of evidence convincing which I did. In later conversations there were things that I found convincing and he didn't and vice versa. But on the whole, much the same patterns.

Well, after I met Knorosov I spent a year in Peru and then I moved to Texas Tech, and in Texas Tech I was hired... My father-in-law was the Dean of History and Social Sciences. And I continued to correspond somewhat with Knorosov. But of course anything from Russia was considered suspicious, and anything from the U.S. was considered even more suspicious in Russia. And I would have been willing to keep on corresponding with Knorosov, but there was a point where he decided he had better not keep on corresponding with me. The Cold War was far too difficult a problem for Mayanists to deal with.

His application of Knorosov's methods to the texts of Chichen Itza

I began looking at items connected with Knorosov's decipherment, and I found some items which he talked about and some items which I thought would be developed out of his ideas which he had not developed. One of the things that I noticed was that at Chichén Itzá, in Beyer's collection of the inscriptions of Chichén, you had eleven examples of this five glyph sequence, and they included a glyph read by Knorosov as *k'a* and one read by him as *k'u* and one read by him as *ka* and one read by him as *la*...

I was looking at Beyer's account of the inscriptions of Chichén Itzá and I noticed that there was a correspondence between Knorosov's readings of four of the glyphs in a five-glyph sequence with the name of an Itzá ruler mentioned in the Maya records who was called Ka Ku Pa Cal. And this is spelled in Yucatec K-A-K-U-P-A-C-A-L because there are two sounds which are glottalized 'k's' pronounced *k'a* and *k'u*, approximately, my glottalization isn't very good. And this is distinguished from a simple *k* sound pronounced *ka*. Anyhow, four of these then corresponded with Knorosov's readings. Now that's enough to suggest that the fifth reading should correspond as well. So I looked at the fifth [glyph] and it was crosshatched. And I realized except for the crosshatching it was equivalent to a sign which Knorosov read as *pa*. And I thought this was a strong indicator that crosshatching might sometimes appear under other circumstances where a simple blank appeared in the codices. So I read this sequence as *k'a ku pa ca la* or Kakupacal. And because he was mentioned as an Itzá at Chichén Itzá, a substantial number of people found this convincing who had not been convinced by earlier evidence. At the same time, it didn't convince Knorosov himself, who continued to think that the two crosshatched and without crosshatching ought to be different.

At any rate, I did a paper on this, on phonetic signs, which was based largely on Knorosov's work but with some additions of my own and it was published in Mexico City by Ruz Lhuillier who was also interested in these problems and had excavated in the Maya region.

His relationship as teacher with Peter Mathews

I don't really recall a meeting, I certainly recall Peter very soon after we met because he was a very notable student; he was tremendously engrossed in Palenque. He knew more about it by then than I did, although I thought I knew quite a lot. I was working on the final version of my book on the Maya and still had a fair ways to go, but he arrived here

and he was one of those students who picks up on most of what you say, occasionally disagreeing but perfectly capable of defending his own views.

He knew about Maya. He'd come out of Australia and he knew, and he very rapidly learned and learned and learned more. And he could talk about it. And he could say, "No, that doesn't look right." And would. And, you only get students like this on rare occasions. I've had, I've been lucky enough to have several of them. But they are by no means run of the mill. They're very unusual. And you recognize them when you get 'em. You know that these people are different, and the quality of their thinking is different. Now, Peter could remember what things looked like. This is normal for archaeologists...

I had a sabbatical in 1973-1974 and had arranged to take it in England where I was planning to work on various things including the final manuscript of my book on deciphering the Maya script. And among the things I was working on was Palenque, and I got an invitation from Merle Robertson to come down to Palenque to a conference that she was setting up. It was to be a Palenque conference that no one had done before and that would deal exclusively with Palenque. A wonderful idea. And I said, "Well, Merle, I'd love to but I can't afford to come back from England and I'll be in England. I have got a rather unusual request. I've got an undergraduate student named Peter Mathews, and Peter knows more about Palenque than I do. And I think Peter should come down and attend the conference if that's all right with you." And she said, "Well, I guess so." Or words to that... She wasn't enthusiastic, but she was willing.

The First Mesa Redonda de Palenque

Let me say something about the first Palenque roundtable. This was set up by Merle Greene Robertson. She was delighted by Palenque and by everything that went on there, and she thought that there should be something devoted to Palenque. And she tried to think of everybody that she knew who might have something to say about Palenque that might be interesting and important. And this was a new idea. And she felt that it was time for people to come to Palenque instead of to go to meetings in New York City or Arizona or California and talk about Palenque. She thought, if they're going to talk about Palenque, they should do it at Palenque. And then they could check on something if they wanted to and they could go look at the thing they were talking about instead of just somebody's slide perhaps. So she called up and asked me to come down to Palenque and to be prepared to talk about the inscriptions at Palenque because she knew I'd been

working on this. And I told Merle that I was going to be on sabbatical in England in 1973, 74, and suggested...

(OFFSCREEN TALK)

I told her I was going to be on sabbatical in England in 1973 to 74, and therefore it was impossible for me to go to Palenque. But I said I had a student named Peter Mathews who knew more about Palenque than I did and that I thought it would be helpful if I sent Peter rather than coming ... because I couldn't come. And Merle thought that would be all right. She wasn't enthusiastic about the idea. Undergraduate students are not what you normally invite to conferences. But she did. And it was very important that she did because this led to the collaboration between Linda Schele who had been working with Merle at Palenque on the art of Palenque, and Peter who had been working on the inscriptions. And it was the combination of inscriptions and art which led to the full recognition of the glyphic sequence of the rulers of Palenque.

The 1974 Dumbarton Oaks Miniconference and later meetings of the group that formed there

One of the people who had been impressed by the work that Peter and Linda came up with and the results that they got, had been Betty Benson at Dumbarton Oaks. And Betty Benson decided that she would hold a conference on Palenque at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, and she would get together most of the important people who had spent time or who had direct interest in Palenque, and she was actually prepared to have me fly from England and to pay for Peter to fly from Calgary and to pay for Linda to fly from Alabama even though the latter two were definitely not of the professional standing of almost everybody else that she invited.

Betty made one tremendous error. She did not invite Ruz Lhuillier who had actually excavated the tomb of Pacal at Palenque, who was in many ways the leading authority. Now, her reason for this was because she knew he was on sabbatical in Paris and she had heard indirectly that he wanted to stay in Paris, he didn't want to do other things like flying to Washington. But she did not contact him and talk to him about this and it made Ruz into an enemy for our group and he had been friendly. And I was very sorry; I had been a fairly good friend of Ruz's for quite a long time and this lost me Ruz's friendship, even though it wasn't anything I did.

(OFFSCREEN TALK)

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Of course the conference was a setup for essentially the Harvard people involved with Dumbarton Oaks, in terms of the layout, and one of the leading people who was there was Tatiana Proskouriakoff who had been invited down, and there were a series of important scholars and they included Floyd Lounsbury of Yale, and that was to prove important.

Peter and Linda in this crowd were not dressed like most of the rest and their attitudes were not like most of the rest and Linda liked to present herself as an Alabama hillbilly, although she had been working on nuclear submarines earlier, and she made a point of cussing at every possible opportunity, and she used this to shock people and she was full-steam ahead on anything she thought. And when Tania was talking about something at Palenque, she made some passing remark about something and immediately Linda said, "That can't be right!" Just like that. Shouted. Strong. And she didn't wait until Tania was through talking to say this. And she came on and with her usual cussing, I think she perhaps wasn't cussing quite as much as usual. But she definitely was making her point.

And she mortally offended Tania. And thereafter Tania would have nothing to do with the people in "that phoneticism group". Now, she worked regularly with Peter Mathews. She would certainly talk with me at length at any time I came to see her. She admired and talked with Floyd. "The phoneticism group", as far as she was concerned, was Linda. And she didn't like Linda. And it was a great pity because Linda liked her; it was simply their styles were just too divergent. Linda would have hated the idea that anybody could think that she was a lady. And Tania... would have hated the idea that anybody thought she wasn't.

This conference which was arranged by Betty Benson was in the very elaborate quarters of the Dumbarton Oaks. It's a very elegant neighborhood in Georgetown, and it's an area that I like generically. My friend Dick Bryant lived in Georgetown, he and I were in that area quite a bit. So I like to be there, and this was a generally pleasant meeting with a lot of people I already knew and probably a few that I didn't. Tania had come down from Harvard, bringing Joyce Marcus along, and Floyd Lounsbury was there with Mike Coe, who of course as an undergraduate had been with me at Harvard. And Mike and Floyd had been doing a lot on the phoneticism in the script. And then there were various scholars from other areas, and of course I had come in from England, and I thought I was well ahead of everybody and I was in fact well behind everybody. And Peter and Linda were there; they were very definitely not... *acoutered* or otherwise in the kind of style that one would expect at a Harvard meeting. Dumbarton Oaks was under Harvard's authority, with a considerable degree of autonomy. It's one of the many things of that sort associated with Harvard. And anyhow, there had been various rather formal

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presentations, and among others... Tania gave a talk about some of the things she'd been doing, and she said something about one monument at Palenque, and Linda immediately piped up and said, "That can't be right!"

And of course, Tania was not used to having people tell her she couldn't be right, particularly someone who had no status of any sort, particularly interrupting her. And she didn't like any of that. And it was this divergence in style between herself and Linda that led to a situation where the two never were able to communicate effectively, and unfortunately Linda wanted to talk with Tania, and she wanted to let Tania know how much she respected her work, but she was never able to get past this barrier that was set up the minute she said that.

(OFFSCREEN TALK)

Linda was a very brash person, and she was trying to give the impression of being an Alabama hillbilly, although she was anything but. She was teaching how to do classes in the arts rather than more art history or anything of that sort. She was extremely well informed on an exceedingly wide range of topics, which she didn't necessarily let you know anything about. In this particular case she was right, and Tania was wrong. When she said, "You can't be right," she knew what she was saying. But, it was the wrong way to say it. And I don't think Linda ever quite understood that. She liked to shock people, but she didn't really understand all of what shocking people meant.

(OFFSCREEN TALK)

Well, of course, this conference ended on a quite different note. Tania and the majority of the scholars who had been there took off in various ways, and Sunday morning, the ones who were left were those of us who were talking, particularly about the phonetic aspects of this. And, though Mike Coe had gone, Floyd Lounsbury stayed there, and I stayed, and Peter and Linda stayed, and Betty Benson was there as the person in charge. And Betty, in effect, acted as a librarian while we started tossing ideas back and forth, and saying, "This is, this is, this is... You can't do that unless you do this." Linda was explaining that vines and foliage had to be lineages and I said, "If they're lineages, there has got to be a word for it in the dictionary. If it isn't in the dictionary, I'm not going to believe you. If it is, I'll believe you." And much to our astonishment, it turned out there was the word *le* was in fact quite close to this interpretation. And we found that we each approached things in very different ways, and with really quite different backgrounds and knowledge. I frequently knew more about other areas of the world. Floyd and I were the ones that knew about the technical processes of the decipherment. Peter and Linda were picking those up, but they were still in the stage of picking those up, and they had done

some remarkable decipherment, but it wasn't based on a thorough understanding and knowledge that other people had done in other areas and so on.

This meeting went on and really, it was amazing. Betty didn't participate much in the discussion, but she did a tremendous amount of facilitating, and that continued to be her role... She encouraged many meetings in which that particular group would get together, and we'd talk quite a bit... One time, Floyd came up to my home in New Hampshire, and Linda and Peter came along. And this was when Linda and Peter were both studying at Yale, with Floyd, and they were learning things, and I had flown back from Calgary to New England, and I went to my place and they came around to the place, and we sat there and Jane [David's wife] was fascinated the way we -- pretty soon the living room floor was covered with codices, particularly of course the Dresden, and we were looking and reading this and saying, "No, that -- mathematically that's not right," and then, "No, but this has got to mean this," and sometimes agreeing and sometimes disagreeing. We had a very pleasant time on that, and we got quite a lot done.

And we continued to work together, and these meetings where we did this sort of thing actually became the models, or prototypes, or whatever you want to call them, of the Texas meetings, which were at a much larger scale, but Linda became convinced that if you only had the professional people in on things, they mixed them up. You needed to have people who weren't part of the professional mix in order to get it right. And this led her to doing the same sort of thing with other people about other subjects. In a sense her relationship with Texas started with doing this sort of thing with respect to the Mixtec codices, and unfortunately the personal relationships involved in that ended up not standing the strain of two strong personalities.

(OFFSCREEN TALK)

On Sunday morning, I stayed behind with Floyd Lounsbury and Peter and Linda looking at the rubbings that Merle Greene Robertson had provided of the sarcophagus from Palenque. These showed the early sequence at Palenque which fed into the sequence which had been worked out by Linda and Peter. And these rubbings showed various plants spring up with rulers springing out of the plants, and it was extremely interesting to see this and to try and figure out what was being said, and we were all looking at it, and one of the typical sorts of results that happened when we were working together later was what happened as Linda looked at this and said, "Now, I think these plants have got to symbolize lineage." And I said, "Well, if they symbolize lineage, there's got to be something in the dictionaries." And of course I'm paraphrasing because I don't remember what we said in any precision. And we looked in the dictionaries, and we found that the word *le* in fact was a word which had connotations dealing with foliage

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and meant lineage. And this was true in a number of different Maya languages. And when we found this, we were all very impressed with Linda. But conversely, I think she was impressed with us. And she was certainly impressed by the fact that we said, "You've got to do this. You can't just say 'it means.'" She was used to the kind of context where people could just say, "I think it means this, so it means this." And we didn't let her get away with it. And this was typical of Linda. She never, in all the time I knew her, did I ever hear Linda say... "Well, I must be right, and the other kind of evidence can be ignored." She learned about the other kind of evidence and how you knew. She did that with linguistics. She didn't know a thing about language and how to use it when she started. She did it later with astronomy, and she picked up the astronomy tremendously fast. She did it with all kinds of ideas, and... I would, "Say you've got to know about other parts of Mesoamerica," and she might say, "I don't want to," but if I pushed at it and said, "But you can't understand this unless you understand that," she did it. She always did her homework and some besides.

(OFFSCREEN TALK)

I should explain that we were all looking at this, we were down on our hands and knees, and this tremendous imagery was there, and Linda had spotted the fact that the foliage and the trees fed into what seemed to be the ruling lineage. And had therefore extrapolated this idea of lineage and we demanded the other kind of evidence in support. Now, Betty Benson was there constantly and she was exceedingly useful in a very quiet and unobtrusive way. She was not participating in the argument to any serious extent. Every now and then she might say something, but mostly she let us do the talking, and she... If we mentioned needing to check something in a dictionary, she'd pull a dictionary off and we'd look at it. And... Floyd, I think, was the most surprised by this, because Floyd said later he had never worked with anybody else in his life. He had always done his own work, and he just wasn't used to the idea of working with people. But he adapted very rapidly to that idea.

(OFFSCREEN TALK)

I think it is worthwhile to consider our very different knowledge and attributes. Floyd of course was one of the best linguists in North America, and I don't know, my guess is he probably knew on the order of 20 languages -- well. How many he knew poorly, I don't know. He was the world's leading authority on Iroquiosan, he knew Japanese, he recorded the last remnants of dying languages in Arkansas, he was all over North America recording materials, and he knew of course all the European languages. Well, I don't know if he knew all. He might not have known Basque. But he certainly knew German, English, French, Italian, Russian, Swedish, I think Finnish, I'm not sure of

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others. He was extremely precise and he had the kind of rigidity that was absolutely typical of linguistics at the time. A sort of, a demand for formal evidence which related in formal and definable ways. It was just exactly the sort of thing that I think is typical of code-breaking rather than typical of decipherment of scripts. But in Floyd's case, it was associated with a remarkable capacity to decipher scripts. He never considered himself a decipherer of script. He would talk about "translating" the panel and so on, and he would argue about what the particular glyphs meant and so on, but he didn't think of himself, I think, in the way that most decipherers do... I think Mike Coe considered himself much more of a decipherer than Floyd did, although Mike would have admitted that Floyd was far his superior in this. And I admit this. So this is what Floyd brought to our group.

What Linda brought was a tremendous perceptive capability plus a tremendous attention to detail and wide knowledge... of everything from science fiction to... art styles. She knew a lot about art history, even though she didn't think of herself in art history terms, or at least refused to put herself in the category with art historians, yet art history is what she ended up... This was the category in which she became a professor at Texas, and certainly by then she did consider herself an art historian and epigrapher. But she had a directness of perception, and she had a tremendous visual memory, certainly insofar as I had occasion to see and know about it, it was the best visual memory of anyone I have ever associated with.

Peter knew the technical details of what had been done in the decipherment of Maya better than any of the rest of us. He held the whole Thompson catalog in his head. He was nearly Linda's equal on visual memory; certainly much more than either Floyd or I. And he generally had good critical sense, and I on the other hand have a very wide range of knowledge about lots of things, and I have been interested in the history of decipherment and process of decipherment; I was interested in how things fit into other things, what you can do from data set A to amplify data set Y, which most people think can have no possible relationship, and why you can do it even if there is no relationship. I think I have a combination of perception of relationships and ability to think about them critically, which I don't think is awfully common.

(OFFSCREEN TALK)

I think that one of the things I had to contribute is precisely the fact that I wasn't focused in the same way that the others were. And Floyd was by far the most focused because that was the entire training of linguists in those days. And I know I shook him up, and he shook me up, but I was very much interested in the sorts of things you could bring in if you weren't focused; that Polynesian mythology had a lot to contribute to Maya studies, and indeed *Maya Cosmos*... Linda Schele took one of my central ideas from Polynesian

mythology about the great tree, the crocodile tree... it was a lizard tree or a shark tree in Oceania, but I transposed it as the visual crocodile tree which you get in Mesoamerica in terms of the concepts they had about it in the mythology of Oceania.

The decipherments that I was particularly involved in were those associated with this group, of essentially Floyd and Peter and Linda and myself. And we met not only at Dumbarton Oaks where Betty Benson arranged several other meetings, and not just in New Hampshire, we also met here in Calgary a number of times and we met in Texas so we've met a number of places and we kept intending to have a joint publication on particularly some of the Palenque material. But somehow that never did quite work out.

(OFFSCREEN TALK)

We were thinking about the relationship of Pakal, we were thinking about the monuments, we were thinking about the problems created by the fact that he was a "four katun Lord", which means somewhere over 79. This didn't accord with what many people thought of the body as it was found. But, we found additional evidence that biological deterioration is not always as even as many people have been led to think. We looked at evidence from new inscriptions at Palenque, we found out a tremendous amount, we argued the role of the different patron deities at Palenque, we argued about some of the phonetics. I remained unconvinced for a very long time that *tun* and *haab* were to be read in the way that Floyd had been insisting from the beginning that they should be read, because it didn't seem to me to coincide with the way they were used in the colonial texts among the Maya. But in fact, material presented by Matt Looper in his book on the great king of Quiriguá finally convinced me that this was right. I had been half-convinced for perhaps ten or fifteen years, but it kept bothering me, but the final evidence that I looked at there is such that I just have to accept it.

(OFFSCREEN TALK)

His initial reaction to David Stuart's theory of redundancy in the syllabic glyphs

I met David Stuart I think first when he was perhaps seven or eight. And I never heard him give a professional paper until he was fourteen. But thereafter, he was steadily progressing, and he was one of the early people who could be considered as part of "that phonetic group" in a broader sense. David grew up drawing Maya glyphs. And he's still drawing Maya glyphs. And perhaps the most important paper he gave was the one he gave in Denver where he talked about the so-called 'counting glyphs.' These glyphs were ones that had been defined by Eric Thompson, and there were about 8 of them, and he

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decided that all of them were simply different graphic forms for the glyph *u*, and were to be read phonetically as *u*. Well, we know that in some contexts, some of them were read in different ways.

I found this exceedingly difficult to believe, and I... I have finally accepted it. But it took me many years to accept that there weren't grammatical functions other than those we were recognizing, and that it was not partially a grammatical difference and not all to be read *u*. So this, on the other hand, was perhaps the single most crucial factor in leading to interpretations where people recognized more and more and more substitution going on and substitution in equivalent passages became probably the principle method of determining the phonetic value of particular glyphs.

In 1984, at a meeting in Denver, David Stuart presented a paper on the Maya counting glyphs which had been defined by Eric Thompson. There were about eight of these, some of which had known values in certain contexts, although in David's view, in this context, all of them were substitutable for the *u* which was one of the group. *U* as defined by Knorosov, and perhaps even earlier, was part of this. But anyhow, these... I was a commentator on this paper and... I indicated that I thought it was of very high technical value, that it was presented with good technical data and that it was a very interesting concept and possibility, but I also told David I didn't believe it. And it has taken me many years to come to the point where I do believe it.

The paper by David Stuart, which I have been discussing, was in a sense a very important shift simply because it implied massive substitution of signs for purposes other than those of communication or grammar. If one sign *u* was written in eight different ways, then one certainly couldn't say that they were doing this just because they wanted to say the grammatical *u*. They had to have a substitution, and once this was recognized it was obviously an indication that there might be more substitution going on in other matters than we had expected. I think that Floyd and I particularly and others as well resisted this idea because in most scripts it isn't true; you don't get widespread substitutions, and also because it seemed that the possibility to substitute glyphs were being used to indicate some difference, minor or major, seemed a generically more probably hypothesis. We really thought that it wasn't likely this would be happening. We knew some cases in which this did happen... We were absolutely convinced of some of them. But we didn't think as a principle that it was one that was going to be happening frequently. And this was the reason which Knorosov never accepted anything based upon this principle. He maintained that the principle was wrong, and absolutely wrong, and remained wrong. And so his students learned a very different phoneticism, and it

was one where you didn't have more than one value for one sign, and conversely you didn't have the same value for a whole series of different signs. You kept it at a one-for-one level. And this was what we would have expected *a priori* on the basis of what we know of most other scripts.

(OFFSCREEN TALK)

The importance of substitution when it was recognized as a widespread phenomenon meant that by looking for comparable passages which only differed in the substitution of one or two or three signs, were probably fully comparable passages, and the signs were differing values for the same phonetic element, and this principle has been basic to the decipherment which has been going on among a tight group of people of whom David and Linda and Nikolai Grube and Simon Martin and a number of others have presented the material.

His impressions of the current state of the decipherment.

The decipherment of the Maya script, I think, is probably somewhere between 85 and 95% complete at this time. It might even be higher than that. But at the same time, we're constantly finding new glyphs and new inscriptions. The San Bartolo inscriptions, where we have painted glyphs from the Pre-Classic for the first time in any quantity, are going to make a major difference in understanding some of this.

(OFFSCREEN TALK)

There are some that are so rare and in such obscure contexts that it is very unlikely that we will ever be able to read them, even approximately. And we are going to be finding inscriptions with unfamiliar glyphs, I think for a very long time, including particularly when we get information from time periods where we have not had much information, such as the San Bartolo inscriptions.

(OFFSCREEN TALK)

Oh, there's no possibility of turning everything upside down. I must admit, every now and then, when I look at some of the more recent texts, I begin to feel they are approaching some of the gibberish which I would have rejected in deciphering the Maya script. But not very often. We have got an adequate decipherment in the same sense that we have adequate decipherments of ancient Egyptian and cuneiform. That doesn't mean that everything is right in those scripts, or in the Maya decipherment. It does mean

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that things are definitely in a shape which is much better than I had ever expected to see in my lifetime.