

## LINDA SCHELE

*Interviewed September 20-22 1997 at her home office in Austin, Texas*

[Linda Schele](#), a seminal figure in late twentieth century Maya studies, was interviewed for this film a few months before her death from pancreatic cancer in 1998. Her training as an artist and college art teacher had no particular focus on the Maya. But from her first involvement with the site of



Palenque in the early 1970s, through her establishment of an influential series of hieroglyphic workshops at the University of Texas, to her late involvement with Maya ethnography and the modern Maya of Guatemala, she had a powerful catalytic influence on the field and on a vast range of individuals. At her death, the Linda and David Schele Chair of Mesoamerican Art and Writing, at the University of Texas - Austin, now occupied by David Stuart, was established in her memory.

*In this interview conducted by Michael Coe and David Lebrun, she discusses:*

- [Her first visit to Palenque](#)
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- [The 1973 Mesa Redonda de Palenque](#)
- [The 1974 Dumbarton Oaks Miniconference and her ongoing collaboration with the working group that resulted from that meeting](#)
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## Interview Transcript

### Her first visit to Palenque

MC: Linda, a lot of people have gotten into the Maya field because, basically, they're familiar in some way or other with academia, they've grown up in that kind of environment, or like our friend Evon Vogt they've grown up next to Navajo and Zuni Indians, are quite familiar with Native American cultures. Some of them have come in because they have been, children of academics, like Peter Mathews and Nikolai Grube, and Steve Houston. How did you manage to get from Tennessee into this field?

LS: Now I can tell the story in complete detail. We were in Laclede Missouri, at my grandparents' 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, when my mother walked up to me, my husband and several cousins and said, "When are you coming home for Christmas?" And my husband, on the spur of the moment without having said anything to me ahead of time said, "We're not. We're going to Mexico for Christmas." So I went back home and thought, "Well, what I really ought to do here is fix it so he can't back out." So I got a research grant for \$213.61 to take film, slides of the ruins, as long as we were making the trip. So we took a silver van, built a bed in the back of it, and took off with two students with us, doing the typical things, reading the typical books, the ones that tell you, "Don't eat the food," you know, "Don't trust any Mexicans, etc. etc."

And as we were winding our way down the Gulf Coast, I saw that there was a road that went by the shore and one that went inland and, being a central Tennessean, I always wanted to go for the sea. But at the last minute we saw there was this funny place just off the other road called Palenque.

And so we went on the inland route, and we went to Palenque. The first person I met was Moises Morales, and the second person was Merle Robertson. And I fell absolutely and totally in love with what I saw at Palenque and with the people. Told Moises when we left, having spent 12 days in Palenque and one 36 hour stint into Yucatán, I told Moi I'd be back. His reaction was the same reaction I have with people who say that now: most of them don't come back. But every once in a while a crazy one does. And so, I came back. And Merle seemed to have known something too, because I'd never seen Merle give a rubbing away. But she was rubbing the Palace Tablet. And she made a little rubbing – it's in the other room – a little rubbing of an "iwal" glyph where the bird turns back and eats the eye of the jaguar. And she gave that to me then, in a unique action that I've never seen her do any other time. And I came back several times.

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MC: You must have been really struck by the Maya art style in a way few other people have immediately. I mean Palenque is the most beautiful, in many respects, of the Maya sculptural styles. You were lucky to have gone there, weren't you?

LS: I think, yeah. There's a quality to Palenque that's not reproduced in the others. I had been teaching an "introduction to art" class for about two years, by the time we went. It's the sort of 101 or 301, depending on which university numbering system it is, that everybody has to teach their whole career as a service to the department. And I was guided into my first teaching of it, by a real master art historian, and I had built up in my head – because I was a professional painter – I had built up in my head what an art style would look like if the art was at the center of the culture instead of peripheral to it. And when I walked among Palenque's buildings, I saw a culture where the art was central, and I really was driven to understand who had done it and why and how. And to learn as much about it as I could.

MC: Of course you have always been a painter and an artist yourself. How did your view of your whole philosophy of art, going after painting, conceptualizing painting, relate to what you saw among the Maya?

LS: Well, I'm not sure that my own painting did relate, but I think that being educated as a painter gave me two advantages. As a painter, you're taught to see pattern, and the ability to perceive and reproduce pattern is at the core of being a painter no matter what you do. That was one thing. That was a great advantage. But I had also had a junior teacher of painting, who had taught me to paint in a methodology he called "the happy accident," and his philosophy was born out of Japanese experience, in which you learn your craft very, very well. And when you begin painting you break the white, which means you just get color on to whatever surface you're painting. It doesn't matter what you paint, but as you paint you wait for the painting to do something unusual, and then, you follow it where it wants to go.

Well, that's the research methodology I use in Maya stuff, and have for the last 30 years: to approach it by gathering all the information you can about one subject, and then wait for it to pattern. And when it patterns you follow it, wherever it wants to go.

MC: When you walked into Palenque with your husband, David, for the first time, those many years ago, did you have any glimmerings that people might be able to read more than the mathematical and calendrical stuff, more than the dates on this. What did you know at that time?

LS: Nothing, nothing. When we prepared to go to Palenque the first time, I was in Mobile Alabama, man, they just had the funny travel things, you know, like the Frenchman Presselle (?) who went down the coast of Yucatán. I mean these are famous

now, these sort of travel things, but that's basically all I had read. I'd probably read your book, but when you don't have the structure for things to hang on, they sort of go in one ear and out the other. I was abysmally ignorant. I remember one incident in the Mérida market, when we didn't have any money, and we arrived in Mérida on Sunday. And we were eating in the market and talking about not having any money, and this Yucatecan, said, "Well, I'll cash a \$20 traveler's check for you." And I sat there and tried to figure out what he was going to make out of it. When he was cashing my traveler's check, right. He was the one taking the risk, not me.

What was real lucky is that when I came back the following summer and the summer after that, which would have been the summer of '71 and '72, I worked with Merle Robertson and Robert Rands and other people like that, who taught me how to do iconography, and how to think about archaeology by being in the field. And during those years, I read everything. I read Thompson, I read Proskouriakoff, I read Berlin, Kelley, all of those people. And I can remember most vividly reading Thompson's *Maya Hieroglyphs Without Tears* and ending up in tears. And I had decided by about 1973 that it wasn't ever going to be broken, that it was just too difficult. I commanded what Tania had done, and what Berlin had done, and had applied it to Palenque. Berlin had found four kings [of Palenque] and named them A, B, C, D, and we'd applied all of that, but that was basically it. I didn't have any hope.

## **Her collaboration with Merle Greene Robertson**

MC: To go back to the nuts and bolts of what you were doing with Merle in '71 and '72. You were doing architectural drawings at that point, were you? Or were you also drawing the reliefs as part of those things?

LS: What I did a lot, when I went home, is I projected slides on the wall, and made drawings. I've still got them over there in the map cases, and that helped me learn the pattern of how to see the stuff, most of all with Robert Rands, and arguing with Moises. I walked the forest, and by 1973, we tried to make a map of Palenque and that's the one that Merle published.

MC: It's the only map published so far.

LS: It's the only one that's published of more than just the excavated center, yeah.

MC: Had you heard of Knorosov at all by this time? You had been reading Kelley.

LS: Oh, I think I'd heard about him, but I hadn't read anything of his. And if you came into the literature, at that time you read Berlin and you read Thompson, and you read

Tania, they all were horribly against it, and so, basically, I came into the field being a Kublerian. He was the principal guy that I believed.

MC: George Kubler.

LS: Yeah, in the beginning, in those first two years. And of course, he was a very good friend of Merle's.

MC: And what was his point of view about all of this?

LS: Well, actually if you look at Kubler's work during those years he made some real contributions. I heard him present in 1972 a paper at a conference that was held at MARI, at Tulane University at New Orleans, where he took off from where Berlin had ended and identified another king that he called Snake Jaguar. And that paper was the one that I used as the basis, then, to jump off for the paper that I presented at the First Mesa Redonda.

MC: Let's imagine that instead of going to Palenque you'd gone, say, to Chichen Itza, do you think you would have ended up differently?

LS: Yeah, because it took me until the last three years to learn, 4 or 5 years, to learn to love Chichen. And I always—I thought that Chichen was the ugliest hottest place in the world, and it took a long time for me to come to understand it.

MC: Do you think that the epigraphers would have gotten where they were if they had started at Chichen instead of ending up there in their researches?

LS: No. Palenque's always been at the heart of what's going on in the iconography. It was the first published. It's had the longest texts. The texts have been available longer than any other site. I think it's always been a pivot.

MC: What was Merle's contribution in those days do you think, to the whole thing? The recording obviously was tremendously important, that she was doing.

LS: Well, Merle did rubbings all over the place, and the rubbings today are really, really, important. I mean they are becoming more and more important as time does damage to the monuments, and she's got them out on CD-ROM, so they're available to everybody now, in ways that are extremely useful to draw from.

But, even with the importance of the recording and the drawings and the rubbings – Merle in 1971, began building her house at Palenque. And in my own experience, as an academic now with 30 years of experience, I see in my own experience that the academic

world breaks down into basically two kinds of characters. There are turf protectors and there are the people who use their position to aid the field and the people that are coming up in it. And Merle, as she began to build her house, created a center where everyone was welcome, where all the material that she had was available to anybody who wanted to use it, that young, stupid, ignorant people, like me, were allowed to come and sit at the feet of people. There was never—in a lot of places I was rejected, because I didn't have a Ph.D. and I wasn't from an Ivy League college. Merle didn't give a damn for that, and everybody was welcome in her house, and she was basically the same with everybody, and that became crucially important to the early '70s, and throughout the '70s.

DL: Could you go back to your first visit to Palenque, and describe your first meeting with Merle. What your first impression of all this was, when you first got there?

LS: Well, when we went to Palenque the first time in the van, a guy named Mario Leon was still the head of the ruins. Mario was a local rancher and was deeply involved in the local community, and when he was there the ruins had a different flavor and a different sense about them than they have ever since. For instance, you could camp out in the parking lot. And so for the first week or 10 days, rather than staying in a hotel room, we camped out in the parking lot. We had met a Guatemalan exile who lived in Washington DC, we had met him in a hotel in Villahermosa the day before. And he told us that when we went to Palenque we had to look up this guy named Moises Morales. Well, I couldn't say Moises. So he said, "Don't worry about it, just ask for Moses Morales."

So, when we got there a little tall kid of about twelve asked to be our guide and we accepted him, and we went through the ruins the first time with him. And as we were walking out down the gravel path, this guy was walking out with a bunch of Frenchmen, and he spoke to me, and I had a little conversation with him, and then asked him if he knew somebody named Moses Morales. And it was Moises. And so we talked for a little while, and he invited us down that night for supper at the Cañada where his family lived.

And Moises is a guru. He has a capacity to make people love those ruins, and to see the ruins and to feel special when they came to Palenque, and he worked his magic on me. And he's the one that introduced me to Merle.

Merle – this was even before she had the house – there was one of the rooms in the Cañada that had Merlie's name above the door. And she and her husband, Bob stayed in that one, and we were still in our van. I remember, most of all, the most powerful moment was going in to do the rubbing of the Palace Tablet, and Bob, her husband, being real worried I was going to interfere with her, and bother her and ask questions. I just sat on the floor and was very quiet and watched her and everything. After awhile he came over there and started telling me what she was doing and all of that sort of thing. And

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that night she gave me the rubbing. Honest to God, I've never seen her do that to another person.

DL: What was it like that first day, walking through the ruins?

LS: I can't remember. I do know that we were supposed to be in Palenque for 8 hours, and after 7 or 8 days the students and my husband were frustrated that I wasn't following the plan. I fell in love with Moi; I fell in love with the creeks; I fell in love with the sounds of the cicadas; I fell in love with going down into that tomb; I fell in love with the people, because Moises, and Mario Leon and everybody like that were just as open as Merle was. I mean, they all sort of, took you in.

One thing that we did, first time I met Alfonso, who is my student now, Moises' second oldest son, Moises took a long walk with all of the children in his family and me and my group back to the Chakamaks (?) and the place that's now famous where the bridge crosses the river, but there wasn't any road then. I mean, we just walked through the hills in a big circle. Like an idiot, I drank water out of the river. It was probably okay then, but you know, I can remember saying to Moi, "You can't do this in the United States." And I also remember we carried instant oatmeal with us in our packs, and we exchanged instant oatmeal for *posole*, and got the much better end of the bargain.

Just being able to do things like that, was to me a real marvelous thing. We finally left and went off to Yucatán. We spent one night sleeping at Cobá, on the side of the road. And the second night we slept in the parking lot of Dzibilchaltun. We woke up the next morning, looked at each other and said, "Let's go back to Palenque!" [laugh], and we did, and stayed for as long as we could there.

MC: Did you go with Merle into the tomb, or Moises?

LS: Moises.

MC: Did you actually get inside beyond the [metal gate at the entrance to the tomb itself]?

LS: Not that time, but over the next couple summers, I became Merle's handyman. Alfonso and I became the ones that did all of her lights for the publications of her great books on Palenque. And so, yeah, Alfonso, Merle and I spent something like 19 days locked in the tomb while she was photographing it.

MC: So that was the first time you actually got inside that tomb. Of course at that point nobody knew the name of the guy in the tomb, wasn't that correct?

LS: Right, they called him 8 Ahau or the Astronaut, yeah, right, exactly.

## **The 1973 Mesa Redonda de Palenque**

MC: That was all to come. Well, now let's think about what happened in August 1973, when the gathering on Merle's porch took place.

LS: Well, that was an interesting time. Gillett Griffin, from Princeton, was giving, if I'm not mistaken, was guiding David Joralemon on his very first sort of circle through the Maya area. I had met Gillett either one or two summers before, when they were doing the film on Rio Bek. I remember going through the ruins with David and Gillett, in which I told him, basically told David, all of the things that I had learned by working inside the ruins in a concentrated way for three years. And he told me about [Coe's exhibit] *Maya Scribe and His World*, which you had had a seminar on, I think the semester immediately before he came down.

That evening, we all met on the back of Merle's porch. I'm quite sure that it was Gillett who popped out, after one or two nice glasses of rum, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if we had a conference on Palenque in Palenque?" And we all said, "Yeah, that would be really, really, great."

Well, we didn't do anything, but Merle sent out a series of letters in which she invited people that she knew to come down to Palenque over the Christmas break, and an amazing number of them said yes. And everybody came at their own expense. That was Merle's prestige, I guess. Thirty seven people showed up.

MC: Wasn't it David Joralemon who suggested the name, call it a Mesa Redonda?

LS: Oh, I don't remember details like that.

MC: I think Merle says that. That brings us to that December, to that meeting, which I think most of us agree was a watershed in Maya studies.

LS: Well, that meeting, again, was a strange meeting. It wasn't typical. At the time I didn't know it wasn't typical. Merle sent out letters to all of the major people in the field that she knew. Her close friends, and I was a close friend by then, were also invited, but what I think was so unusual about that meeting is that most of the major people in the field, including you [Michael Coe], and others sent your graduate students. Now being a teacher of graduate students, I wonder how so many of them got the money to be able to make a trip like that. Basically, the difference between that conference and any other conference I've been to since, is that it was a combination of the archons of the field, and



I don't just mean regular archaeologists, you were there, Betty Benson was there, Will Andrews was there, Floyd was there. These are people that held the absolute top academic levels in the field, but there were also people like me. Dave Kelley couldn't come, so he sent Peter Mathews. Jeff Miller, Dicey Taylor, David Joralemon. What it was, was a combination of the archons and the up-and-coming young graduate students. And then, Merle opened it up to a lot of amateurs that came in the area. I remember one, you had an undergraduate, Bardawil.

MC: Larry Bardawil. Even an undergraduate could come to a thing like that.

LS: Well, yeah. I think Merle was teaching at Robert Lewis Stevenson School, and some of her students were there. I can't remember if any presented papers, but they were there. The way I remember it is that I think that Merle, on the one hand, and you at Yale, and I'm actually going to mention Kubler here too, Kubler was training the graduate students that came down from Yale, were teaching a new kind of — it wasn't new, but there were a bunch of people that were doing structural iconography. And for the first time — well, I don't know if it's the first time. you have far more longevity in the field than I do — but it was a time where we got together and concentrated on one site and people presented studies of iconography and symbolism, in very particular ways that acted like openings to thinking about things.

Bardawil's paper on the Principal Bird Deity is still a classic. My own paper — I don't remember giving it, actually —but my own paper had come out of a conversation/argument that Bob Rands and Merle and I had had on the Sarcophagus the summer before, where Bob pointed at the rubbings of the people on the side of the Sarcophagus and said, "These people are Gods." And he was arguing, if I remember correctly, that they were Gods. And as we were arguing back and forth it occurred to me that the iconography of the Sarcophagus, and of the stuccos in the tomb, was the same iconography as the Group of the Cross. And so, I wrote my first paper—this is the first professional paper I ever presented anywhere—on comparing those sets of iconography and showing that one, Snake Jaguar's [in the Cross Group], was for accession, and Pakal's—we didn't know who he was then, he was called Sun Shield, after George Kubler's name for him—Sun Shield's iconography [in the tomb] was for death. And like I say, I don't remember giving the paper. I remember you liked it at the end.

MC: Of course I liked it. One other thing about it is that we could take what was going on—if questions came up or people didn't really take a point or believe in it or something — we could go out to the site from the conference and check it. We could go up to the Temple of the Cross.

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LS: And we did too. Merle set it up so that we had papers in the morning, and in the evening and in the afternoons, we went to the site, in small groups and bigger groups, and all sorts of things.

MC: This was the first time we were getting on, thanks to David Joralemon, to the bloodletter and the perforators.

LS: He presented the paper that broke that loose. There were a huge number of papers, like Jeff Miller's made an argument that the Kimbell and the Cleveland Stelae were both from Calakmul. He began the whole Site Q debate with that. There were other papers in there that are still classics. You did the Tortuguero box—

MC: That's correct.

LS: But the other thing that was critical about the Mesa Redonda was not only that the papers were given, but that Merle, regardless of whether they were beautifully edited or perfectly reproduced or whatever, she got those papers out and available in a year. And so, by the time the next Mesa Redonda happened, everyone had the former one in their hands.

MC: Now the really dramatic thing there, of course, beyond the wedding of iconography with every other aspect of Maya research that went on for the first time that I know of at that Mesa Redonda, was the coming together of the key people to work out the dynastic history of Palenque.

LS: My recollection of what happened is, you were the chairman on the final day, which was a Saturday. What we did is we met in the morning, and people in the audience suggested themes that it might be good to look at in the afternoon. So, I think, I popped up and said, "Do you want me and Peter Mathews to see if we can find some more kings?"

We haven't talked much about Peter, but – I got to Palenque about a week early, before the Mesa Redonda started. And Merle had received a letter from Dave Kelley, who was in England at the time, and couldn't come. And he said that he had this very bright young student named Peter Mathews who he would like to be able to come in his place. Well, Merle never had a chance to get a letter back to him, because it only came the week before, but on the day before the Mesa Redonda started, I walked out the front door of Merle's house and walked out towards the Cañada. And there was this strange looking guy with long hair, a handlebar mustache that went around his face up to his ears like that, carrying two heavy suitcases, and I walked up to him and said, "You must be Peter Mathews." And he almost dropped his suitcase, because he didn't expect to be known.

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Merle put him upstairs in her house. During the week before the conference, he and I had become pretty good friends, so it was he and I that began working on this.

MC: He had these notebooks—

LS: Now wait a minute. Don't get ahead of yourself.

DL: Before we get to that particular day, where were the Mesa Redondas were held. What was the physical environment, who was there. Give us the setting a little bit.

LS: Well, the first one was held in the Cañada. And the Cañada is, sort of, a dirt road with houses and restaurants on both sides of it that was owned by Moises Morales' family. There were two brothers, Moises who was the middle brother, and Carlos who was the older brother. Carlos had 13 children. Moises had 11 children. At the beginning there were only four rooms and this scrawny little restaurant. Across from the restaurant was Moi's house, where he and his 11 kids lived. There was an attached house to it, and all of his boys lived in the attached house. The first couple of summers I went there, that thing didn't even have a roof. Before the Mesa Redonda, what they did was they built a wooden floor across of it, and they put a *champa* on top of it, a thatched roof thing. The day meetings were held in that *champa*. I brought down a slide projector from Mobile. Merle had a couple of slide projectors, and so forth. The night meetings were held in her living room, so that it was a combination of the two places. Not very big because there were only 37 of us. We didn't need the kind of place that the later Mesa Redondas did. Later on they became 200, 300, 400 people, but in the beginning, there was only 37 of us.

DL: Did other folks from the area start showing up after the first year?

LS: Yeah, they were always welcome.

MC: Moises invited all the guides. He felt they ought to know something about what's going on.

LS: Yeah the guides came, Mario Leon, the *jefe* of the ruins, came. There were a lot of people, local people who came and participated, and I think a couple of times they were even allowed to give presentations, some of them a bit strange.

MC: Let's get back to Peter and you, and also Floyd.

LS: Okay, let me set up. This is what it — let me get a piece of paper here — Okay.

In Merle's house the living room was a gigantic room that had a counter that cut off the kitchen. You and Betty Benson and all of the other archons got on a plane and flew to

Bonampak and Yaxchilan, so we didn't see you guys all day. A bunch of other people went to the ruins. There weren't very many people around.

So Peter and I set ourselves up on the counter, and Floyd was across the room working with other people, at another desk that Merle had set up across the room. So the technique, that Peter and I decided to do—we had the four kings A, B, C, and D from Berlin; we had the two names Snake Jaguar and Sun Shield that Kubler had set up, and what we did is we followed a title that Berlin had pointed out on the 96 Glyphs, and this was the title [draws it upside down]. Now at the time we didn't know what it meant, but Berlin had pointed out that it was in front of all the names on the Tablet of the 96 Glyphs.

So what Peter did is, he arrived with two notebooks that he had done as a Junior Paper for Dave Kelley. (Now, I only have one of them left. The other one has since been cut up, because he sent them to me later.) In one of them he had compiled every single solitary monument known from Palenque, and all of the dates. Like here's a beautiful example of Peter's organization [shows them]. He also had a second notebook that had every published drawing of Palenque, and so what we did is we went through and found every example of this title, and wrote down the nearest date. We knew from—well, let me put it this way, Peter knew a hell of a lot more than I did—we knew “birth”, we knew Tania's “death” glyph, we knew the events that Berlin had pointed out, “seating” – at the time we didn't know it was seating, but we knew it was some sort of inauguration .

And what we did is just made a long list. Every time we had a problem with a reading, and a possibility of maybe this could be this or that, Peter with great trepidation and fear would call over the archon Floyd. And Floyd would come over in his typical way, and say, “Well sure, I don't know why it can't be that.” By 5:00 o'clock that afternoon, we had gotten large pieces of poster paper and we drew the name of each of the kings on it. We put the Long Count dates for them, and when you guys came in after supper that night, they were around the top of the wall.

MC: That was the first real dynastic list ever worked out for the ancient Maya.

LS: I suppose it was. Tania had found an awful lot of individual rulers, but not a consistent—although it may—I think maybe her Piedras Negras—

MC: She had 6 or 7 of them there, just Ruler 1, Ruler 2, Ruler 3.

LS: And then we had them with funny names like Sun Shield, and Lord Toothache—

MC: Nicknames...

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LS: Yeah, and I remember this was a real major issue, because Moises Morales brought up that this was dishonoring the ancients, by giving them these weird names, names that were funny. He argued that they should be given names in Chol, and there was a major disagreement among the participants. Some people wanted to use nicknames, because to give them Chol names would assert that we knew how to read ‘em and all sorts of things like that. And thank God, Moises, when there was a vote, Moises’ point of view won, and they were named in Chol. And I think that was good for the field.

MC: I think the fact that the—we were surrounded by Chol, literally, who were both of the people who lived in the countryside and the inhabitants of Palenque today, they were participants in the meeting, had something to do with this. We were out-voted in more than one sense!

LS: Well, calling a person Sun Shield vs. calling him Pakal is a big difference.

MC: Well, now that it turns out that we really do know what the language was, it is a form of Chol. So we did the right thing in voting the way we did. Let’s get back to Floyd. When did you first run into Floyd?

LS: At the First Mesa Redonda. I didn’t even know who he was. I did not realize, I mean, I was so innocent, that I didn’t know he was an archon, I’d never heard his name before. He’s famous in anthropology as a kinship specialist and as a linguist. I’d read the Dumbarton Oaks papers that you guys had published in 1968, but I didn’t know who he was. And I met him at the First Mesa Redonda, and – I must say that this goes back to the split I make in academia between turf protectors and those who feel that their duty is to serve the field – all of the great people that I met first, from Merle to Bob Rands, to Betty Benson, to Gillett Griffin, to you, to Floyd were all the sharing types. You didn’t protect turf, you didn’t care—Floyd didn’t care what degree, or whether anybody had a degree. He worked with anybody who had good ideas, there were no restrictions on the way he shared what he knew.

MC: Now, Floyd had a profound influence on you, as he did on the rest of the field. Could you tell us something about that?

LS: Okay, in the first three months after the Mesa Redonda, you had found a Maudslay in the Yale library stacks that wasn’t in the rare book room. You took that out and had a microfilm made of it. Jeff Miller got that microfilm from you, and then within a month of the first Mesa Redonda, when it was over, he copy-flowed the copy of Maudslay, and that was the first time I ever saw Maudslay, but he sent it to me. Now that time, 1973, was also the beginning of the Xerox revolution. There had been copy machines before, but they weren’t available to people. There weren’t copy stores then. As a faculty

member in the University of South Alabama, I was able to go into the University and get 10 or 12 of these things, copies made of the copies. Floyd had sent me his formulas—

MC: For working out the dates—

LS: ...For working out the dates. I wasn't very good at it, but my tactic was, I took all of these texts from Palenque, and took 8x10 sheets like these, and just glued them together and made accordion foldouts, some of them 20 feet long, and took all of Peter's dates and everything that had been written about them, and began to lay them out where the dates were. And the first thing that became really obvious to me is that there was structure there that people hadn't talked about. So that Peter, Floyd and I and Dave Kelley began almost immediately a set of letters back and forth between each other. I still have all of them, in fact Chris Villela's organized them so we've got them. A tremendous amount of the stuff was worked out in those letters through arguments.

Like, I can remember that one of the main arguments between me and Floyd—at the time he was at Dumbarton Oaks—we were arguing over the king named Kan Hok Chitam now, that was called Hok then, and how old he was, because he wanted Chan Bahlum to be real old in the Group of the Cross, instead of 6 years old like he is in his heir designation. And we had this long argument back and forth about how old they had to be, and finally I sent him a letter showing that these two are 6 years old and these two are older, and Floyd bought the argument. Dave [Kelley] was in it, and I think, in those letters, we worked out the first idea that the material could be worked syntactically. That even if you didn't know what the glyphs meant, you could tell the part of speech. And at the end of that time was when Peter flew to Mobile, and we wrote the paper that was published together. He knew more how to write than I did, but it was the laying out of the second half of the dynastic history.

MC: Now apart from dynastic history, which of course, goes back to Proskouriakoff and Berlin, the methodology of doing that, there's also a contribution that Floyd was very, very interested in, and that's actually how to read this thing, this stuff in its own language, whatever it happened to be, whether it was Chol Maya, or some other form of Maya, and on that the, of course, key figure was Knorosov. In your recollection was there recognition of Knorosov's approach and Floyd's later paper on that, in the Dumbarton Oaks writing conference, on the 'ben ich' affix, the methodology of that—

LS: Now that one was already published, 'cause that was published in 1968.

MC: That was already published?

LS: Yeah.

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MC: By the time we're talking about in '73, at the First Mesa Redonda, and the immediate follow-ups, to actually read a name like Pakal for instance, this didn't happen at that Mesa Redonda. It happened right afterwards.

LS: No, it happened in that one.

MC: Pakal was read at that time?

LS: Yeah, and it was read in it, because Dave Kelley had written a paper on Kakupakal. And Peter pointed out...

MC: At Chichen Itza.

LS: ...that the Pakal at Palenque was exactly like the one at Chichen. So he ended up with the name Pakal. Floyd... the phoneticism—if we want to deal with phoneticism and the linguistics we have to go to the first Dumbarton Oaks conference.

DL: Let's hold off on the Dumbarton Oaks conference, yet.

LS: Because I have a lot to say about that, but that's where—

MC: The first Dumbarton Oaks Mini-conference?

LS: Well, the one where Tania was there and she—

MC: We'll come to that.

DL: Let's go back a little bit to that day when you and Peter and Floyd were working together. In sort of summary, the three of you being together, what did the each of you bring to the table at that point? Each of you didn't previously do this on your own – something about the chemistry. What were the contributions, in summary?

LS: You know the best person to talk to you about that is Jane Kelley. She spent years watching the Mini-Conference group operate.

DL: I meant at the First Mesa Redonda...

LS: What you see in the Mesa Redonda going forward into the Dumbarton Oaks is just an accumulation of people that were part of the group.

DL: I just mean specifically, you Peter and Floyd.

LS: Well, at the time Floyd—when we were actually doing the dynastic stuff—Floyd was there as a reference. We would ask him if it's possible that you can do this. And he would say yes or no, talk to us a little while, and go back to his corner, what he was doing. Peter was awed by him, and I didn't know who he was. I didn't know I was supposed to be awed by him. You're going to have to ask all of the others!

In my own perception of the how the Mini-Conference group has worked over the years, is in some ways, I've always acted as the catalyst, because I haven't accepted that the general truth that's understood is final. So I'm always the one that's pushing them to go beyond where we know. But it's real difficult to analyze what each person contributes to a collaboration like that.

DL: Back on that day again, in Palenque. It was my understanding that you were working with the hypothesis that there was a certain grammatical sequence, that you would find the time expression...

LS: No, not by then. We weren't thinking anything about — Peter may have known enough to think about it in terms of grammar at the time, but I didn't. The beginnings of working it in terms of grammar and word order came later on.

DL: When?

LS: At Dumbarton Oaks. I mean, what we were doing is looking for that title and the nearest date. Both of us knew, although Peter knew a lot more than I did, both of us knew what "birth" or Tania's "initial glyph" looked like. We knew what her "death glyph" looks like. We knew what Berlin's "seating glyph" looked like, and Peter had, had a lot of other ideas from working the inscriptions that he brought out. You had a question, Mike?

MC: Well, you know, Tania's toothache, inaugural glyph...

LS: Yeah, but that didn't occur at Palenque.

MC: That didn't occur at Palenque.

LS: And so we used as sort of a start the seating glyph that Berlin had pointed out on the 96 Glyphs, but in the mean time, we also found the one with the hand and the knot above it. Peter and I found that one.

MC: Now moving later, after that Mesa Redonda, of course, there were a whole series of Mesa Redondas. They're still continuing. I didn't go to any of the other ones, but there was a Second Mesa Redonda, and that was the one that Alberto Ruz showed up at, and



that was the first sign that there was going to be a reaction to what you people were doing.

LS: The second one had about 75 people, and Alberto Ruz agreed to come. I later found out from people that were in the Centro de Estudios Maya that in the months before the Mesa Redonda, what he had done, is he had cut up the drawing of the sarcophagus sides and gave individual researchers in the Centro individual glyphs and told them to go find out everything they could, in the literature, about that glyph.

When he started to do his presentation, I had life-size Xerox copies of Merle's rubbings of the Sarcophagus inscription. We took those and pasted them up on the wall in Merle's living room.

And he went through his entire paper, and when it was over, I tried as politely as I could—I thought I was being very polite—and I said, “But Dr. Ruz don't you see here that there's a verb, there's a date here, and then there's this glyph. And there's a second glyph that's the same as the one that's next to this person. And if you go then to the next one there's another date, that's the same glyph, that's a verb. And this is a name, and it's the next guy in the row.”

And after I showed it along one row, he turned and looked at me and said, “How do you know that's a verb?” And Joyce Marcus popped up and said, “Yeah, how do you know that's a verb?” And the fact of the matter was, I knew it was a verb because it was self-evident that it was a verb, but I didn't know anything about linguistics at that time. And Floyd wasn't there, and you weren't there, and Peter wasn't there. I was all by myself, so I said, “I'm not sure,” and sat down. And then I did my dissertation on the verbs and nobody ever asked me that question again.

### **The 1974 Dumbarton Oaks Miniconference and her ongoing collaboration with the working group that resulted from that meeting**

MC: Another thing that came out of that, besides the obvious resistance on the part of certain archaeologists to all of this, was the Mini-Conferences at Dumbarton Oaks, which were in large part stimulated by Betty Benson.

LS: Actually, the first of the Mini-conferences was, if I remember correctly, in March or April, immediately after the December [Mesa Redonda] meeting. Betty had been so impressed, I think, by what happened at Palenque that she decided that she would take it on herself to get together all of the major people in epigraphy and introduce them to the young Turks, me and Peter. And so, she called the meeting, and we all went to it. If I remember correctly, the participants were you and me, Peter, Floyd, Tatiana

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Proskouriakoff, Joyce Marcus, Dave Kelley, Merle Robertson, and George Kubler. Do you remember anybody else that was...?

MC: I think that was the group that was meeting in Washington, that's it.

LS: The conference started on a Saturday morning and went till Sunday. Floyd was the Fellow at Dumbarton Oaks, so he was there in residence. The meeting was a bloody disaster. Merle sat next to me, terrified that I was going to get into a fight with Tania. And she wanted to make sure that I didn't do that, so she sat on me the whole time.

MC: That was the first time you had met Tania, wasn't it?

LS: Yeah. Kubler was the most bizarre of all. His question to the table was, "Are we sure this is writing at all?" And he wanted to go back to the very basic beginnings and even debate that. I can't remember much about what Tania did, except she was pretty closed. She didn't want to look at the patterns very much. I do remember that on the Saturday evening, we had supper at Betty Benson's house and Tania took me off to the side and told me that the way to work was to work by myself, figure out what's going on and then just publish it and people could either take it or leave it as they wanted to. She absolutely wanted nothing to do with any kind of collaborative work. On Sunday, it continued in the same sort of, reluctant stalemate. I think you left about 1:00 o'clock.

MC: I'd had enough, I couldn't take it any more.

LS: We promised to meet Tania and Joyce for supper that night, and they left in a taxi to go back to the hotel. From this correspondence that had been going on, I turned around and looked at Dave Kelley and said, "I want to talk to you." And he said, "Yeah." And Floyd said, "I've got something I want to say too." Floyd had ordered Merle's rubbings of the Sarcophagus — not of the sides, but of the lid, [of the inscription] around the edge, 'cause this was when he was writing his paper on the sarcophagus lid, that was published in the second volume of the First Round Table. And he brought them into the main library, and we took them and rolled them out along the floor. And we got Merle's rubbing book, it was the first one that she did, which had the individual rubbings of the figures on the side.

And Dave Kelley, Peter Mathews, me, Floyd and Merle, down on our knees, on the floor at Dumbarton Oaks, started running the names, and running the dates, and matching the people to the portraits on the side, and in two and a half hours we had the first 200 years of Palenque's dynastic history worked out. I can remember the strangest sorts of things, as—we got to arguing over whether Hok's name was a peccary or what, and this disembodied arm delivered a book on the natural history of the animals in the area into the middle of the thing. Or Floyd would say, "Gosh, I'm thirsty." The arm would come

in from the other side with a glass of ice water. And that was Betty, she was facilitating us, and we got done about 10:00 o'clock that night. I mean, we walked home absolutely elated, like that last night at the Mesa Redonda.

And Betty never invited back anybody who wasn't on that floor that night. And that became the Mini-Conference group.

MC: That kept on going...

LS: 'Till 1979. In fact, it goes on today, 'cause I continued to fund it. We get together every year or two years. It's been two years since we've gotten together, now.

MC: So there's been about what, 10 Mini-Conferences, or how many?

LS: Oh, I've lost count.

MC: More than that.

LS: Probably many more than that. But during the 1970's the critical— see, we had decided that we were going to publish all of Palenque. It never got published. It just never did work out. Some of it will be published in my next book. But we were going to do all of the inscriptions, and each time we came together we had another one of these explosions, and most of all, what happened is we began, under Floyd's direction – this is where the phoneticism came in. I mean, Floyd had taught himself Russian, so that he could read Knorosov in the original. And Floyd and Dave had been Knorosov's great defenders. And so, as Peter and I became practitioners of epigraphy, we learned phoneticism without any argument. We never learned the other way of doing it. Floyd and Dave, to them this was the logical conclusion, and we just learned phoneticism. And then Floyd guided us through the paraphrasing of the text using the known syntactical patterns of the language.

What that gave us the chance to do is that we could write paraphrases that did not have to be specific. We could say "on 12 Ahau 8 Kumku, whatever, he did something, Lord so and so who had this series of titles...", and with that you can begin to reconstruct history. And I think, that's a really important point to make. To date [1997], linguistic decipherment has not been productive. It's offered a great deal of detail, but it hasn't been the driving force behind the decipherment, because as far as I can tell, decipherment has been the byproduct of reconstructing history. And so, what the epigraphers have been very successful doing is they go in trying to understand *texts*, not trying to understand signs. And as they work the texts, the signs fall out.

MC: Do you think this is why, after a long period of time, where the codices, the books, had been sort of primary, during this period of the '70s and early '80s, and even going back to Tania's work, people turned their attention away from the Codices, (which have no history in them, the ones that we have), to the actual texts on the monuments. I mean, the emphasis has been on the monuments, rather than on the books, but now it's probably coming back to the books.

LS: Yeah, but the books are a completely different kind of literature. I mean, there were probably historical Codices, and it would be wonderful if we had one of those. The books have entirely different kinds of discourse structures, and those discourse structures work, but they don't work on the scale of say, the inscriptions of Palenque, where you've got public inscriptions that are 700, 800, 1000, 1200 glyphs long, and you get paragraphs and repetition and cross references and all sorts of things like that, that gave you the grammar and the syntax. I think the grammar, as long as—even following Tania's and Berlin's methodology—as long as we tried to do the decipherment by looking at glyphs, we couldn't do anything. The decipherment came when we started looking at texts.

MC: Because you've got the context.

LS: Because you've got the full context. You can set up environments to test values.

MC: Now this brings us to the question of how—all of this that had gone on before, the Mesa Redondas, the Dumbarton Oaks Mini-Conferences, and the collaboration that had been going on between epigraphy, art history and archaeology, and so forth, sort of, came together in a new way, and that was—that was the *Blood of Kings* show. I mean, that was a watershed too.

LS: Well, yeah. Do you want to talk about that or do you want to talk about—I mean, are we going to talk about the workshops?

MC: We can do the workshops too, sure.

## **The origin of the Austin Workshops**

LS: The Austin workshops began as the brainchild of Nancy Troike. I had met her at the 1975 ICA, International Congress of Americanists, in Paris. Nancy thought that it would be really neat to have one of these strange, weird epigraphers come over here to Texas and teach the Texas students how to do decipherment. So she set up the first one in 1977. That one took place over 4 days, in the evenings. She got about 150 people, just locally, who attended them. Bill Glade, who was the head of ILAS, the Institute of Latin

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American Studies, thought that was kind of neat. So he supported Nancy in holding more.

So the first one that was advertised nationally was in 1978. And they continued going until today, and have expanded to include, not only the original form of the workshop, but there's a symposium in front of them with professional papers. Most important of all, there's a week-long set of happenings that follow, where we take people who have never done decipherment before and teach them the basics. We also provide places where people who have learned how to do it can come back and play.

We now have groups on many things that don't include the decipherment. We've got one on Teotihuacan; we've got one on Xochicalco, and Cholula and Cacaxtla. Now, the benefit of this is that over the last 21 years, professionals from all sorts of disciplines, amateurs, people who are interested, aficionados, have all been able to come to Austin and learn the basics of decipherments. In actuality, if you look at the field, there are more housewives that know how to read glyphs than there are professional archaeologists, and that's all because of Austin. So Austin has become the place you come to hear the latest decipherments, to interact--where people from graduate students to housewives can interact with professionals. And I think, they've been crucial in spreading the information and the methodology to a much wider audience than it would have had if we'd kept it in the hands of pure academics.

DL: Aside from the papers that are presented at the conference, speaking of the workshops specifically, has that been a place, pretty much, where the ability to read glyphs had been spread to a wider audience, or has it also been a place where decipherments and breakthroughs have also happened?

LS: Well, it's both. The audience is up to 600 now, and again they cover the full range of the academic and aficionado field. I mean, Mike's come to them, linguists, archaeologists, graduate students from all over the world come. In fact, the place where the Europeans get together and talk to each other—you know, a Belgian and Dutch person won't talk to each other in Europe, but they come to Texas and they meet each other and become friends. They're remarkable meetings, and they have both spread the decipherment and made it accessible to people who have interest in it, but it's also because of the working groups that work after the public presentations, they have become a source of major discovery.

MC: They have also spawned imitators elsewhere, very successful ones.

LS: There are others that do things, sort of like what we do, in other places.

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DL: In his book, Mike sort of poses and keeps wrestling with the question of why was Egyptian deciphered by one man, just like that, and then Ventris with Linear B, and the Maya has been so much a collaborative thing. And I wonder why that is. Why small groups and big groups getting together have been so important to the Maya. Is it because of the contribution of the present language, and the fact that there are so many different dialects, and different people know them? Why is that, and how does that dynamic work?

LS: I don't know the answer to that question. I think the reason that the Egyptian decipherment occurred as the work of one man -- well, in fact, it didn't, but that's okay, the keys came from one man -- is because they had the luck of the Rosetta Stone. That's a tremendous advantage, to be able to have the same message in 3 different writing systems. But even in Egyptian, one man did not sit down and decipher all of the texts. It took decades and decades and decades for people to work out the full detail and to make the translations of the texts available to people who aren't professional epigraphers.

I think that the collaborative approach, these small teams working together and this interaction, became the primary way of working in Maya decipherment because we don't have something like the Rosetta Stone. Because when you are one person working alone, outside of an environment where you can test your results, it's just too damn easy to seduce yourself to believing that you've got the truth. You need that interaction, and that continual testing of the results, in order to keep correcting the course. The course doesn't go from this point to that point. It goes that way a little bit, and then comes back there and then goes back there, and every time a new personality comes it changes the dynamic of how it works.

MC: I hate to raise any kind of question about what you said, but about the Rosetta Stone business, of course, that was a tri-script in three different writing systems, but two languages involved. It was bilingual and a tri-script. There is a bilingual and bi-script that was available to Maya scholars since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and that's Landa, Spanish and Maya. He lays it out very well, and yet it was misunderstood and ignored for so long until Knorosov came along. I really think there is a Rosetta Stone.

LS: Actually, you know who the first one is who figured it out. Mike, have you ever looked at the front of the Motul Dictionary, Hernandez's version? Hernandez had figured it out, and it's written in the beginning of the Motul Dictionary.

MC: Martinez Hernandez, the editor of the Motul Dictionary, Yucatecan scholar.

LS: He had worked out that it was the phonetic rendition of the sounds of the Spanish alphabet.

MC: Did he have it therefore, as a syllabary?

LS: No, he did not get to the syllabary, but he had worked out exactly what the error was in Landa.

Well, I'm not sure that I would take Landa's alphabet to be the same as what the Rosetta Stone did. Because what it gave us, is it gave us an inventory of syllables, and it gave us some logographs, in terms of the days and the months. But basically, it's an inventory of syllables, and the problem that plagues the field for 150 years is if you don't believe in phoneticism, it's useless.

MC: That's right.

### **The 1986 *Blood of Kings* exhibit and its impact**

MC: Well, as the great Sir Isaac Newton once said, "Every action has a reaction." And there obviously was a whole series of reactions to the new move towards decipherment, and the various conferences that went on, and publications that came out in the wake of them. There have been a lot of criticisms, particularly on part of the dirt archaeologists, about the kind of work that you and the rest of us have been doing—that it's too much concerned with the Maya elite, that it doesn't emphasize what the ordinary Maya-in-the-streets, so to speak, were doing, etc., etc., etc. That it's propaganda, not really history, certainly not accurate history. What's your response to all of this?

LS: Well, I noticed from the beginning of 1973 and '74, when the First Mesa Redonda happened, that there were three primary reactions to what happened. One was, "This is happening too fast. I'm going to wait and see if it proves out." Virtually every scholar that decided to do that has disappeared. The second reaction is that we were devils, and the only rational thing to do for the field is to try to get rid of us, one way or another, make us disappear. A few of those people are still around, but not very many. And the third reaction was to jump for the wagon, and go with it as fast as they could, and most of those people are the leaders in the field now. Archaeology, I'm not sure—I know that one of the reactions from archaeologists is that Mesoamerican archaeology has been--during its entire history, that I know of—"theory-ridden," and there were lots, and lots, and lots of archaeologists who had spent their careers as the advocates of particular theoretical interpretations of the Maya. And what they found in their mid '40's and '50's is that their interpretations were dropping out from under them, because what they said the Maya had been doing didn't match what the Maya said themselves that they were doing. And if you talk about academic war, right—the stakes of the future—and that's what all the argument's been about, is who gets reproduced into the future.

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MC: I think a lot of the reaction took place at the time of the *Blood of Kings* show. That was an absolutely ground-breaking show that really presented to the world, using great art objects, for the first time, the modern view of the Maya, organized by you and Mary Miller. How did this whole thing start? How did you decide to do the *Blood of Kings* show? What was the extent of your involvement? How did iconography and epigraphy all get together in this particular show for the first time?

LS: Well, the Kimbell was asked in the vicinity of 1984 or '85 what they were going to do for the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Texas. It happened that they didn't have an idea, but that a young man from Fort Worth who had been coming to the workshops here had put into their ear the idea that they could do a show on the Maya that could be quite spectacular. So, Emily Sano, one of the curators at the Kimbell, contacted me and invited me up for a talk, and they explained to me what they wanted, and I sort of laid out the idea to them. That we could do a show with pieces that ranked 8 to 10 on a scale of 10, and that we could make those objects speak, so that the Maya could be understood through their own imagery, and their own words. Emily and I sort of talked about it back and forth, and she asked me to sort of pull together a list of pieces, or something like that, that might be really working. And I found myself collaborating and calling Mary Miller in an enormous number of cases, and so, I just suggested to them that they bring Mary in as a co-curator.

And so the two of us worked together. What we decided that we would do is, that we would create themes that would cover the main experiences and the main images that show up in Maya art. And so we chose costume, the objects that they wear, inauguration or accession, courtly life, bloodletting, warfare, and death. And between us we collected pictures from books and probably put together an overall selection of a hundred and seventy pieces. The core of which was the British Museum pieces, which had not been seen for about twenty-five years at the time.

MC: From Copán and Yaxchilan.

LS: The Copán benches and the Yaxchilan lintels, and we had a set of pieces from Guatemala, Belize, and Mexico. And it ended up that those countries, due to competition with a little bit of influence from other people, chose not to participate in it. And so, with the British Museum pieces, the lintels, masks, things like the Pomona ear flare, and stuff like that, as the core of the show, we built up a set of a hundred and twenty pieces. Now, when we began writing the catalog of it, [Kimbell Museum Director Ted] Pillsbury – Pillsbury was great; he was rather funny – there came a day where we went in, and we presented to Pillsbury the show. And he looked at us and he said, “Okay. If this really will work, then you can give me a one sentence name for it, that says the whole thing, in five minutes.” And he started looking. And I don't know, at about three minutes, forty-five seconds, blew off the top of my head, “*The Blood of Kings!*”



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MC: Great title.

LS: Well, he liked it. And so, Mary and I had decided the rules for ourselves, that there would be no piece that wasn't at least a number 8. Now, some of them were ugly, like the captive, but they were incredibly powerful. And so, as we put the pieces together, -- even though we were offered great pieces, we didn't take them unless they fit a theme. And then when Pillsbury talked to us about writing the catalog, he said he wanted the catalog to stand on its own after the show was done. And he said that we could use any objects we needed to in order to make the catalog work. So, we were able to bring a whole set of other photographs in and I suggested to them that they hire Justin [Kerr] to do the photography. At first, they resisted, because they thought he was too expensive, until they started getting the prices from the museums on the photography. And then they hired Justin to do all the photography, and that gave a visual unity to the publication that was quite stunning.

And Mary and I, what we wanted the art objects to do was to act like a window into the world of the Maya. So that when the people came up to look at an object that they could understand who the people were, what the context was, and what the messages were that were being passed on through these great objects. In other words, most of the shows on Precolumbian art -- and in fact, every museum person we talked to said, "You can't do what you're going to do, people don't like didactic shows. They won't stand still and listen for it." Almost every Precolumbian show before then had been beautiful objects, set up in a museum, and the public walked through, and I call it -- you probably won't know this word, but I call it, they were supposed to "grok" the pieces -- that's a great image from Robert Heinlein -- just absorb what the piece meant by some magic aura in the air. And nobody ever, in those shows, attempted to really explain to people what it was they were seeing.

MC: The picture that you gave, I think, came as an enormous shock to a lot of people who had been told in school or had been reading books that said, in the past, that the Maya were just this peaceful, war-hating group of people. They'd never heard of perforation of the penis by great Kings, and extraction of blood under tremendous pain, or the amount of warfare that went on, captive taking, torture, and things of this sort, and I think they were really shocked to see what beautiful works of art came out of that. I mean, it went against the ethic of a lot of people, and a lot of Mayanists had this old idea, that came from Thompson, of the peace-loving Maya.

LS: Yeah. Of course, to the epigraphers it wasn't any surprise. The 1986 *Blood of Kings* was the outgrowth of the First Mesa Redonda. Most of those themes that were in *Blood of Kings* had been treated in one paper or another in the First Mesa Redonda. And the decipherment had just brought all of this history and the motivations and the

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understanding of what was going on, open. But, people had been ignoring what we'd been saying for ten years, or the public just hadn't had it presented to them in a popular, non-academic context. Now that I know, having published four books, now that I know the New York side of this, the reaction to *Blood of Kings* was absolutely incredible. It was Maya-mania for almost a year.

MC: It still is in some respects. And yet, there are dirt archaeologists who ignore all of this. How can they afford to ignore what concerned the Maya who ran these cities, that ran the polities that they are so interested in.

LS: Well, the best insight that I've gotten from that was a wonderful conversation that I had with Johannes Wilbert, when he was talking to me and David Freidel about the real core difference between Native American worldview and our worldview. And the comprehension of those differences that he had come to after fifty years of studying it. And he said that the basic difference between the two worldviews is that we live in a transcendental worldview and Native Americans live in an imminent worldview. And I got real frustrated with that. I thought, this is terrible. How can he mean we've *transcended* and they're... you know, all of that.

So, I went and looked up the words, and what *transcendental* means is that the authority is far distant and removed. And so, our fundamental worldview that basically comes out of Marxism, sets the elites up here and the commoners out here and puts them at war with each other, so that you can't learn anything about the common people by studying the elites, or anything backwards. An *imminent* worldview says that authority is impending right above your shoulder, and I think that the Buddhist empires offer us an awful lot better model of understanding how the power structures of the Maya work. If you want to understand how power and economics and all of this work, you don't go and ask the humblest farmer in the field, you ask the people that run the institutions. Those are the people that create the propaganda, that create the imagery, that create the mythology, or better than creating it, utilize it in order to create the social whole that people live in. I think an archaeologist that's trying to study and understand this and who ignores what the Maya themselves are saying about their own experience are deliberately muting themselves. They are putting blinkers on and they're covering their ears up, filling them full of wax and what they're doing, in the way I see it, is they're creating an interpretation of a world that mirrors their own experience.

MC: Don't you think that aspiring Maya archaeologists ought to be put through a course on epigraphy, the same way that aspiring Egyptologists have to learn the writing system, or aspiring Near-Eastern specialists have to learn the cuneiform system, or aspiring Far-Eastern archaeologists have to learn Chinese writing? I mean, you can't be any of those things without knowing the epigraphy, without knowing how that works.

LS: I don't think that everybody who works in the field, whether they're art historians or archaeologists, or linguists, have to be functional epigraphers, because, now after twenty-five years, I realized that the mentality to make first-rate, leading epigraphers is very rare, not everybody can do it. But everybody who's in this field ought to be able to judge the literature in the same way that, as an epigrapher, I have to be able to read what people are saying about ceramics or about radiocarbon dates, or about any of the other specialized areas of the field. And I have to be able to make my own judgment of whether I'm going to accept their results.

MC: What do you think makes a really good epigrapher? I mean, you brought this up, what qualities?

LS: They have to be very good at pattern-seeing. They have to have a visual memory where they hold two or three thousand inscriptions in their head at once. They have to be skeptical, including of their own work, and it's a weird kind of skepticism, because its a balance between keeping yourself open, and not being run over. It's kind of a hard balance.

MC: How about linguistic training, I mean, in one or more Mayan languages?

LS: I think working with linguistics is terribly important, but again, I don't think everybody has to be a linguist, but they do have to be able to read and judge the linguistic literature.

DL: I'd like to go back. You talked about how after the *Blood of Kings* show there was a year of Maya Mania, could you elaborate on that? What was the reaction to this and were there other events that sort of triggered this huge growth in interest in the Maya. What form did that take? What was that about?

LS: I don't perceive that there's been that much of an acceleration in interest in the Maya. What has happened is it has opened up, so that more people, who aren't just specialists – I mean, the one thing that is not talked a lot about, in the decipherment, is: in the 1940's and '50's, there were only two or three places in the world where you could go to, and have the resources that you needed to have in order to do this. You had to be at Harvard, or you had to be at Penn, or you had to be someplace like that. What happened in the late '60's and early '70's is that Xerox machines became distributed throughout the United States. By 1985, when I was up in Washington, you could buy your own copy machine, and there's one sitting over there on the table. What happened with the copy machines was that the materials that had been limited to the hands of a few became widely distributed and available to anyone who had an interest in it, and could get ahold of somebody who would let them have copies. And that's about the time when the Corpus of Hieroglyphic Writing began to be published in earnest, and once that

happened, the field broke open, because it was not the closed domain of three or four scholars. And that's what it was before.

MC: It had to be somebody, in the old days, with access to Maudslay's *Biologia Centrali Americana*.

LS: Or to the things like the archives—the Carnegie Archives at Harvard. I mean, Tania couldn't have done what she did, unless she was working with those archives. And now, that distinction is no longer there. And I think that, is as much as anything what led to the incredible breakthrough.

### **Her collaborations with David Freidel on *Forest of Kings* and *Maya Cosmos***

MC: Let's talk now about the next step, which is the collaboration that you had with Dave Freidel, that led you into a completely new world that nobody had ever really suspected, I suppose, unless, you were a Maya yourself. And that's the cosmology and creation stories that really resulted in new breakthroughs, that even the most skeptical people, now, accept. Although they did not at first. How did you get to collaborate with Dave Freidel? How did that all start?

LS: Well, in 1978 Nancy Troike again, suggested to the art department here, that I be invited as a visiting lecturer. At the time I didn't have a Ph.D., so, I couldn't be a visiting professor. And, I came over here for the first semester of that year, and taught the first courses that I had taught on glyphs. Amongst the students that were here was Dorie Reents, who has now become, in her own right, a great Mayanist. But at the time, she had just come back from working in the field at Cerros with David Freidel, and she gave me copies of the Cerros drawings, and slides and so forth, so I could teach.

In the middle of that semester she gave me a paper that he had sent to her on those masks [on the Cerros façade]. And his interpretations were okay, but his evidence was all Thompsonian. And he didn't know anything about the Palenque Triad, the patron gods of Palenque, or about the Palenque incensarios, or anything like that. So, I called him at SMU, and said, "Freidel, you're right, but for all the wrong reasons." [laughs] And I said, "Dorie and I are coming up." And so, we went up together, and I had a whole bunch of slides on the Palenque Triad, you know, the facades at Palenque, and incensarios, and all of the other stuff that you can pick up about this, and began to educate him about what the stuff looked like. And that turned into a collaboration where we—Freidel's one of these guys that generates hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds of hypotheses, they just come blipping out of his head, but he's got no particular love for any one of them. If someone will shoot it down, he's perfectly happy to see the bubble

burst, and he'll pop up another bubble. And so, we got into these long conversations about how society works, about how ideas come up, how innovation occurs and all of this stuff, so that when I was offered the possibility of doing a book for the commercial press in New York, I chose him to be my first co-author.

MC: Did you know what the subject was going to be of the book at that point?

LS: No, I just asked if he wanted to do it. What Maria Guarnascelli, the editor, wanted was something sort of new-agey religion. And I knew I wanted to write the first history. So, *Forest of Kings* ended up to be an attempt at the first history. There are parts of it that have been changed, but it basically did what I wanted it to. And it caused the same reaction as *Blood of Kings*—"You can't do that." And so, it sold very well. They were very happy with it, so, they gave us a second book. So, this time—

<crew talk>

DL: Okay let's move on to *Maya Cosmos*.

MC: Well, we've got the *Forest of Kings* now, which is still, until today, the only real Maya history that exists, in terms of real history. The rest is all conjecture. Now, we move on how you got into the cosmological side of the Maya, and put out the book on Maya cosmology, *Maya Cosmos*.

LS: The *Forest of Kings* sold a lot and was successful so that gave us the opportunity of submitting a second book. And so, we decided, on the second one, that we would go after the theme of Maya religion. This time Freidel was the lead, and you know, we wrote a proposal and chapter headings and so forth. And it was actually going along pretty good. I might tell you the first night that I wrote the first paragraph, that's when I had the diverticulitis blow up, and almost died—not a good start. [laughs] We each—the way Freidel and I worked is we divide the chapters, and we each write the first draft of our set of chapters, and send it to the other person, who tears it apart and reassembles it and so forth, until we both can come to a state where we agree. And then Joy Parker went over it to make it—take it out of academese and put it into understandable English. The pivot of the book came in January, when I had been arguing with Freidel for hours on the phone about where the tree was and where the scorpion is. And he had been arguing over the phone that there was a Maya constellation of the scorpion, and that it had to be Scorpius.

MC: Our Scorpius.

LS: Yeah, our Scorpius. I was arguing with him. I mean, it was heated battle, because I didn't want to accept it. And one evening, I was sitting at my desk, not here, but at the

old house, and Johannes Wilbert's advice came flooding into my ear. "Always go and see if there's a natural model." And, I got out a star book, opened it up until Scorpius was high in the southern sky and my teeth fell out of my head. I mean, I can remember my chest tightening up, because in the picture there's a perfect picture of the Milky Way going across the sky from south to north as the tree.

I had a seminar, that semester, on cosmology. I got so excited about this, I took it in and explained it to the seminar the next night and showed them the Sarcophagus. And one of my students, named Matt Looper, breathed out of the back of the room, "That's why it's 'och bi', 'he entered the road'." And I,—whap—there went another one. And another student [she is referring to Barbara MacLeod] came to me, and said, "Did you know the Tedlocks say that the three stars in Orion are the hearth." And we knew that it was the hearth—the three stones—that's the place of creation. And during the next two and a half months, every week it went like that. Some student would come up with something else. I would come up with something else. I thought my brain was going to burn out, and the last episode in it was that I went to see the K'in Tahimol, the Lenten Day ceremonies at San Juan Chamula, with Duncan Earl, and I saw them running the banners, and saw them recreate the world—destroy and recreate the world—that brought the entire thing back full circle. It's one of those moments where you could never in your wildest dreams force it to happen, but if it's pregnant, it just explodes. It was like you, in *Maya Scribe and His World*, when you realized the Popol Vuh was on those pots.

MC: It's one of those moments that makes one's life, actually.

LS: Yeah, it's like fire going off in your head. It's just incredible.

MC: By this time, you were heavily into computers, and of course, there are many computer programs that are available of reconstructing night skies at different years going far back into the past, different dates and different years. How much did that play a role, and how much was that tool that you could use?

LS: A whole lot, because Floyd had taught me astronomy earlier on. But the way Floyd and the other astronomers, including Tony Aveni, worked with it, was the coordinate number from the Tuckerman tables. Now, I know that that made sense to Floyd, because he's a mathematical person, but to me it was just columns of numbers. I could plot them on a chart, but I had no way to associate what I was making on the charts to what I see in the sky, until I got a little program called Sky Globe. And in Sky Globe, you can actually sit there and watch what happens in the sky, and it will go back to well beyond any historical period we want to deal with. And that's when I began understanding—or beginning to understand – what the Maya were looking at, rather than what modern astronomers think is important.

MC: It's a different world.

LS: Yeah, it is.

### **Her involvement with the contemporary Maya of Guatemala and the origins of the hieroglyphic workshops in Antigua**

MC: Now, if we look to see what's come out of that book, and the way people look at the Maya today... we've now brought the modern Maya into it, you just mentioned this, that it was San Juan Chamula, what was going on there, during Lent, a certain ritual that was really bringing to life or putting new emphasis on something that you'd been thinking about anyway... But I know that in that book, the *Maya Cosmos*, there's a lot more that draws upon contemporary Maya ethnology, and what the Maya particularly—both in the Guatemala Highlands and the Lowlands with the Chachaac ceremonies and so forth-- you brought to bear that, on interpreting the Maya past. This was all something new, although Thompson had done that, to a certain extent, but it wasn't as sophisticated as what you people are doing.

LS: Yeah, actually, David's and my experience with that was totally independent, but it paralleled. In 1987, I was asked by Maya from the Highlands to begin giving them workshops, and what I got in exchange from them was that they took me to their homes, and they took me to ceremonies in their places, and they took me to divinations. They became the guides for me learning to participate in the ritual world that surrounded them. I also went with some really good ethnographers. Like, I also went to Chichicastenango with Duncan Earl. Duncan shared an awful lot with me, as did many other ethnographers.

At the same time, David was working at Yaxuna, in northern Yucatán, and he began to work with the local men. And his entire way of working at Yaxuna, was to involve the community directly, not only as just workmen, but as people were participating in discovery and were contributing to understanding what he was seeing, and that included Permisia, First Fruit ceremonies, and Chachaac, rain bringing ceremonies, it included healing ceremonies and all sorts of things like that. In my own experience, I'd read a lot of ethnographies, and I could use the ethnographies to find incidents to inform ancient behavior. But, I found my own participation in these things to be far more important.

Now, a lot of people of the archaeologists criticized us for showing more about ourselves than we did about the Maya, but no ethnographer, no matter how good they are, goes into a situation knowing what they are going to find. It's an experience of serendipity. You get invited to go to a certain place, and you don't know whether that place is going to be important or not. And it ends up being a key. And so what David and I did, is we used our experience in Maya ceremony, examined our own emotions, tried to understand how

we yielded to the experience, in order to see how those experiences inform what happened in the past.

You can look at modern divination as superstition, or you can look at it as real good, local psychology, where a person who doesn't do much different than our own psychologists, are helping people adjust to the community and the family. It depends on how you want to describe it, whether the experience is valid from our point of view, or whether it's superstitious and shouldn't be paid attention to. And so, that's what David and I did. We tried to use our own experience in these things to inform the past.

MC: There are very few dirt archeologists who have ever done such a thing, that is, brought the contemporary Maya into the picture that they are trying to build up of the past. So it was rather a unique thing that you did. Although some ethnologists and linguists have certainly, been doing this for a long time, without any question. The people Evan Vogt, Vogtie, has been working with. His long term project in Chiapas has really given us all kinds of insights into the Maya past that we wouldn't have had.

LS: Well, there's that, but there's a really interesting thing that I've observed when I went around with Duncan. A person who is literate in the old system, both in terms of the iconography, the writing, and the archaeology, experiences ethnography in a very different way than people that are trained in modern ethnography, and modern economics, and modern social theory. One of the really great things that we're beginning to grow now, like I have one student now, who speaks fluent Quiché, who is an '*ajq'i*', a Maya priest, but is also fluent in the glyphs, fluent in the iconography, knows the archaeology, and he's going to go to Santiago Atitlan to try and understand the modern rituals that go on surrounding Easter, and surrounding the Christian institutions, and find those parts of them that have Precolumbian roots. And that represent continuity from both pasts of these people. And so, there may be eventually, a new type of ethnographer, who is literate in the entire cultural system, rather than in just one tiny part of it.

MC: How much do you think that the modern Maya, in countries like Guatemala or southeastern Mexico, are going to incorporate these new findings into their own, sort of, cultural and political renaissance? It seems to be starting now.

LS: They already have. I don't think that the Maya writing will be like Hebrew. I don't think it will come back as a modern writing system, because it's basically too cumbersome. But, there are lots of people now in Guatemala who are quite literate in the old system. And their languages have sounds in them that the old system didn't have. They have invented a single sign that allows them to adapt the old writing system to write anything they want to in their modern languages. And they are writing birthday cards, they are dedicating monuments, they're sending get-well cards. I'll show you one, in the other room, a get-well card from the Yucatecs to me. They're using that and imagery,



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not in the way we used to, you know, when you go to a picture and say, “Oh this is a beautiful part.” Pull it and put it next to something that doesn’t make any sense. They’re using it literally. I mean, they know what goes together. And they are publishing books where the publication date isn’t in Roman numerals, but it’s in a long count date, and the date is correctly calculated, and correctly written. Instead of putting page numbers in Roman numerals or in Arabic numeral, they’re putting them on with Maya numbers. And they’ve got their computers with fonts that will now write all that stuff.

MC: Do you think that they’ll actually use Maya logographs, or are they confining themselves the phonetic/syllabic system?

LS: They’ll do both, and they’re already doing both.

MC: They’re already doing both! That’s a sign of immense sophistication, as a matter of fact.

I’d like to go back, Linda, back to these major publications of yours, like *The Blood of Kings*, and like *Maya Cosmos*, like *The Forest of Kings*, where one photographer, Justin Kerr, is who I’m thinking about, has begun as a photographer of objects, but has in many respects been one of the people who has transformed the field, has become a scholar in his own right, and has made advances in the understanding of the past, and of Maya iconography, and even of things that go on in the glyphic system, that you never expected from a photographer. Could you tell me about this collaboration with Justin.

LS: Well, how to say it. There are a lot of photographers that make spectacular, dramatic photographs, that are published in great books, but in which the part of it which you have to see is in shadow, because that photographer was more interested in the dramatic effect of the photograph, than they were in imparting the critical information on the object. And Justin has had this talent, this ability, to be able to photograph objects in such a way that they are beautiful photographs, but all of the critical information comes across in them. He’s been willing to push technology, so that he took the invention of the rollout camera, and not only fixed it so he could use it in his studio, but he made a portable one so that he can take it into the field. But, most important, Justin has always considered it his duty to share his information, and make it available to the field. And because of his generosity, the fact that he published his own books, so that people could have access to them. He provides to anybody who needs it, photographs, reproductions. He’s got printers now so that he can print them out very cheaply, and very quickly. And that capacity, and that dedication to sharing resources is what’s changed the field.

MC: Sigmund Freud used to classify all people into oral personalities and anal personalities, meaning anal retentive. People who don’t want to let things go. Justin is definitely not in the anal category. I mean, he is enormously generous, like you and other

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scholars. But some scholars just sit on the stuff and won't allow other people to look at it, like a dog with an old bone, which makes it very difficult. Justin has been so generous, he's changed it. I know a lot of people couldn't exist, as far as iconography goes, and understanding what's going on without Justin's rollout pictures. I think that has revolutionized iconography, actually.

LS: It's interesting that other fields, like Greek pottery, haven't figured it out yet. Eventually they'll figure it out.

MC: Eventually, they'll come to it.

DL: I'd like to go back to the previous topic of the process of the language going back to the Maya themselves, more detail of how that came about, and how you got involved in that process. You know, going down to...

LS: It's a fairly involved thing. In 1987, I was working my usual summer at Copán. And after,--I forget what they call it--there's been a meeting that's been going on for about ten years, in which Mayan linguists and American and European linguists got together in various places. [She is referring to the *Taller Maya* meetings described in the Josserand and Hopkins interview.] It was supposed to be one year in Mexico, the next year in Guatemala, the next year in Mexico, and so forth, but it never quite worked out right. They had had one of those great Maya linguistic workshops in Guatemala, and two linguists, Judy Maxwell of Tulane, and Nora England, University of Iowa, organized a bus trip, because they knew I was going to be there. And, they organized a bus, and it came over, and it had 26 Maya from the Highlands and 13 American linguists. And, they spent one night, and got me to be their tour guide for two days. So I took them around from stela to stela reading the stelae for them, and reading as much of the text as we could at the time.

Among the Maya was a man named Martin Chakach. He was at the time the director of the PLFM. Now the PLFM is this amazing organization. It's the Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín. It was begun in the 1960s by Nora England and Terry Kauffman, who were at the time working on Maya languages in Guatemala. The idea was that, as linguists -- and it's basically been only the linguists that have taken this responsibility -- that they had the responsibility to teach the Maya what they did, rather than just take from them as informants. So they set up the Francisco Marroquín, not only to be a collector of Maya linguistics, but to teach Maya about linguistics, so that they could become linguists of their own languages. The Peace Corp. supported a lot of it. And they set it up, so that the Francisco Marroquín started the first language school in Antigua, with the point of view that, as soon as possible, they would turn it over to the Maya, with no gringos involved at all, and that language school would support the whole endeavor.

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By the time they got to Copán, the director was a Maya. And at supper one night, he asked me if I would come to Antigua to give the Maya a workshop. Kathryn Josserand and Nicholas Hopkins were with me at the time. And we thought about it for about 5 minutes, 'cause I thought I would *never* be in a situation where a Maya asked for it back. I thought that was not going to be for my generation. And I said, "Yes."

And so, Nicholas, Katherine, and I went to Antigua, about three weeks later, and we did the first workshop, in the building where Bernal Diaz wrote the history of New Spain. Incredible irony. And I did a second one. These were all sponsored by the Francisco Marroquín, and then we skipped a year—I can't remember why—but in 1990, I did another one, in which the idea was that we would take them through Yaxchilan's inscriptions about Bird Jaguar, and take them, mentally, through the process of making history. That's the one that was filmed, and that was the first one where Nikolai worked with me. Nikolai and I have been working together ever since. We do one a year in the Highlands of Guatemala. And then, about 5 years ago, David Freidel organized us so that we would do one in Valladolid with a cultural organization of bilingual teachers. So we teach in Yucatán now too.

MC: What has been the reception among the Maya? And what effect, do you think, this had had on what's going on now, especially in Guatemala, with the sort of new outlook as far as the indigenous people of Guatemala goes?

LS: It's real hard for me to comment on that, Mike. Because, believe it or not, the revitalization movement began around 1987, and this is a situation where I'm not an observer. Nikolai and I are players. What we've done has been an incredible part of what's going on and I don't know what kind of independent judgment I have. Let me give you an idea. The Maya have their own press in Guatemala, called *Cholsamaj*. I'll show you some of the things that published over there. They want to publish a cheap color copy of the Dresden, so that any Maya priest in Guatemala can have a color copy of the Dresden. Well, some years ago, Floyd gave me his copy of the Forstemänn [chromolithographic edition of the Dresden Codex]. I have scanned the entire thing, and it's now on CD-ROMs, and these will go down, they'll publish the Dresden from my copy that Floyd gave me of the Forstemänn.

MC: The 1880 edition.

LS: Yeah—which is now the most accurate you can get ahold of. But they'll publish this so that maybe, it will be under \$5.00 or \$10.00, so that anybody in Guatemala, any Maya priest who wants a copy of it, can have it. And that's the sort of thing that's going on.

## **The importance for the modern Maya of their recovered history**

DL: When you first began to take Maya back to see the inscriptions, beginning to reconnect them with some of the meaning of this, how did they respond to this? What was their reaction to that?

LS: Maya are kind of hard to – they react differently than we do. Obviously, I mean, the fact that Martin asked us to do it, and that they've continued since 1987 – this is 10 years now, that we've been doing them in the Highlands – means that it's very important to them. Some of the Maya don't have any interest in it, but the intellectual community in the—well, let me give you an example. Nikolai Grube brought a set of German businessmen into Antigua to talk with Maya leaders about the possibility of money and this and that. The man that they talked to is, in many ways, the leading intellectual in Guatemala. A lot of people think it's Rigaberto [Menchu] who's the leader, but it's really a man named Demetrio Cojti [Demetrio Cojti-Cuxil], who is the first Guatemalan Maya ever to have a Ph.D. He was educated in Belgium, and he is on the faculty of San Carlos. He has led the fight for control over education and those sorts of things. He was explaining to the German businessmen that one of the main problems that the Maya community is facing, is how do they come into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, taking advantage of computers, and the Internet, and having access to the world, and still maintain their identity. His answer to that is, "We do it the same way you do. We do it with history. We do it by knowing who we are, and where we came from."

Well, that history is those glyphs, because that history in those glyphs give the Maya a written history that is pretty close to as long as anything in Europe. Not quite, but pretty close: from 200 BC to today, an unbroken written history. So the Maya understand, and are coming to understand more and more, what the stakes are in archaeology, and what the stakes are in the decipherment and in the history. They know that my interpretations, or Freidel's interpretations, or your interpretations, are going to be different than their interpretations, exactly the same way that if we look at the war of independence of the United States, the British point of view, and the American, and Canadian points of view are very different, looking at the same facts. And so, what Maya communities that I know – in both Guatemala and Yucatán – want, is intellectual sovereignty. And this material is important to their endeavors.

MC: There is a basic linguistic problem that I know, and you certainly know, that they are faced with, which is that there are many Mayan languages spoken in Guatemala, in Chiapas, in Mexico, and Yucatán. Anyways, between 25 and 30, depending on how you count them, and what you consider viable modern languages or extinct ones and so forth. I believe that there is a move, I think it's in hand now, to select one of these languages as the, sort of national language for Guatemala. That is, that will stand with Spanish as one of the two national languages of equal importance, equal validity, equal recognition.

How does one reconcile the glyphic history, which is really largely in Chol Maya or an ancestral form of Chol Maya with, let's say, if they select Quiché. Or, can this be gotten around?

LS: Oh sure it can be gotten around. Mike, how can we resolve a history that is written in Greek and Latin? I mean we balance these things all the time, because we are a people with a history. They'll work it out. They'll work it out in the exact same way that we worked it out. All they need is room and opportunity to do it. You know, what I've done with them is, when we translated, we translated one line in Spanish, one line in Classical Chol, and the last line in whatever language they speak.

DL: Can you define what you mean by "intellectual sovereignty"? Elaborate on the a little bit.

LS: The right to determine your identity, how other people see you, or what your history is, where you come from, how your children are educated, what languages you speak. The right to be in court, and be in court in your own language rather than a language that you don't understand. It's basically the same sense of identity, and control over identity that all of the Northern Western nations have. But that many of the indigenous peoples of the colonized Third World—these people constitute a Fourth World, and they don't have that sovereignty, and haven't had for 500 years.

DL: And you feel the epigraphy has a place in bringing them back that intellectual sovereignty?

LS: It's a tool that they can use if they want too. Because it holds 1500 years of history, written in the words of their ancestors, not in the words of white people from Europe.

MC: Do you think—I mean, there are two countries largely involved with this; one is Guatemala and the other is Mexico. Do you think that the political situation is going to change in the same way that is has recently in Guatemala to acknowledge the history and validity of these people's culture?

LS: I don't know. Who ever would have believed that it would happen in Guatemala?

MC: I never would have.

LS: I don't know. The government form in Mexico is so different. Unless a true kind of democracy works there—the problem to me is that the PRI is such a "big brother." That the PRI feels as if they can determine what's best for these people, and that's not the equation that's going to work.

MC: I have a general question about the future. The future, not of the Maya – I think there's 6 or 7 or 8 million Maya that are going to have a future regardless of what we do or say. The future of Maya research, particularly Maya epigraphy, what are the big gaps that you think today – if you feel like being a futureologist—are going to be addressed in the future? Or need addressing? What are the black holes, so to speak?

LS: Well, one of the black holes I think is just about to fall, and that's the grammar of the system. There are two parallel and competing possibilities right now. There's the possibility that Steve Houston and Robertson are working out at BYU, and one of my students here, Robert Wald, who has been working on grammar for about 5 years, has an alternative, that I think is probably going to end up being just as viable. And what will have to happen is that both alternatives will be put out, and then the one that ends up being most productive will be the one that we go with.

But, beyond that, we still have a lot to do on finding out and working out what the phonetics of the system are. There are still major debates on that, and there are still major discoveries to occur on that.

But if you take the grammar, if you take the phonetics, if you take the logographs – the process of actually deciphering it, that's only the first tiny, tiny, tiny, little step to understanding worldview, to understanding history, to being able to create this enriched pattern of what this great civilization contributed to the heritage of humanity. And people now – I mean, once all the translations are there, and you've got it down, and you know what the texts are saying, then you can begin to debate, "what do they mean to say, what's the political context going on? What are the motivations of why this king is choosing to say this instead of choosing to say something else? How does this operate with the religion? How does it operate with the economics?" And that's got centuries in front of it. In fact, once you get past decipherment, you've got real history. And since real history is something that each generation creates for itself, it's never ending.

MC: Each time we get one of these Maya pots to look at, in Justin Kerr's rollouts, that we've never seen before, it opens up new questions about Maya religion, and what the Maya really thought about the universe—

LS: ...and the details.

MC: ...and the details of it; it's never ending, it appears.

LS: Which what's quite so wonderful about it.

MC: That's right. If you knew everything it would be no fun.

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LS: Yeah, and if the decipherment just ended up with everybody going home and patting themselves on the back for what they've done, then the decipherment would be useless. The decipherment's a step, a process, it's not an end in itself.

MC: What about yourself? I know from *Maya Cosmos*, what Dave Freidel has written in there, he's been putting a very personal spin on what he's learned about the Maya, and what he thinks about the Maya, and so forth. With Dave it's almost a religious experience to do this. Do you feel the same way about this? Has this changed your life in the same kind of way that he's talking about? This is not a scientific or a scholarly question at all.

LS: I know. If you go back to the first time I went to Palenque – Maya changed everything that I am. I mean, I never anticipated being what I am. And I've also faced two, three, life threatening crises. I'm an alcoholic. I almost died of peritonitis. And I've got cancer, and in every one of those situations, the place that I went to find solace, and the strength that I needed to face it, was the Maya. I want to be buried in Guatemala, not in the United States.

MC: With the Maya.

LS: Yeah, under a tree, on Freddy's land.

Yeah, but the last book, which you haven't seen yet, that I've done with Peter. It's a big departure yet, from the other two I did with Dave and Mary. This one is called *The Code of Kings*. It wasn't my idea. I thought it was quite nice myself. We've chosen seven buildings, and we take students and tourists and any professionals, anybody who wished to, through those buildings at any level of detail they want.

MC: How do you do this in the book. I could see you do this with a CD-ROM. How do you do it print?

LS: We have maps with numbers on it, and they follow a path we set out for them, or they can move through the building in any direction they want to and just find the numbers for the particular part. They can deal with the book like a National Geographic if they want to. They can just read the captions, or they can follow it into any depth of detail they wish to.

MC: It's a self-guided tour, in other words, at an intellectual level.

LS: Yeah. The thing that surprised us is that we chose very famous buildings including the Nunnery Quadrangle, and the Great Ballcourt at Chichen, and you know, Pakal's tomb, and Temple A3 at Seibal, the Great Plaza at Copán, and were stunned at how little

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is written on those places. They're the great tourist draws of the whole thing, and almost nothing is written on them that tourists can access.

DL: You've written various different things on what the relevance of what we find out about the Maya could be for us. In one place you cited Levi-Strauss, and said, "We can spend a long time deciphering a message and find out that, that message wasn't for us." And elsewhere you wrote – in relation to our own reinterpretation of history, as we reinterpret the Vietnam war, our own events – one of the magical things for you has been how the Maya began to enter this reinterpretation of history. How specifically has what you've learned about the Maya affected your own sense of the nature of life, the nature of life and death, who we are on this planet?

LS: I don't know if I can answer questions, big like that. I thought about it on two levels. One is that what people in art history and anthropology are trying to do is they're trying to understand our species, as an organism. We're trying to understand why we do what we do, and why we make institutions that way that we do. Almost all knowledge of that, and all theory of that, that we deal with on that is based on the Old World. And in my way of thinking, we'll never understand ourselves as a species, until we incorporate into our understanding of ourselves the New World. Because here is where human beings have been for 30,000 years isolated from the Old World. And so what institutions, and ideas, and definitions of what it is to be human that they share with the Old World, we begin to think of as human, right? And that's to me the great contribution that understanding all of this has.

The other one was taught to me by Karhryn Josserand, when we were working with a Chol informant. He gave us some strange entry. I think I asked him what they call little obsidians. And he said they would call them "u k'ach lak mam" (?), 'the fingernails of the lightning'. I asked Nicholas [Hopkins], "Why in the world do they do that?" And he just exploded in laughter and said, "Never ask a native speaker why they do what they do. They do what they do because God said so, right." Well, culture is the same way. When you live inside a cultural box, you don't know why you do things the way you do, you just do it because that's the way they are done. In exactly the same way a linguist can come into a language from the outside, and see forms and relationships that native speakers are not self aware about. You can go to other cultures and become aware of cultural and social behavior that you're not aware of in your own cultural context, but that the other culture can act like a mirror.

One of the most amazing examples of that is – I was teaching a seminar on Precolumbian warfare, that started the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 1992, if I got it right, it's the day that the planes crossed the Iraqi border. And we sat there studying Precolumbian warfare for a whole semester watching our leaders and our own television doing exactly the same thing, using the same arguments that the Aztecs had done. And it puts a whole



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different—I mean, when you’re looking at what Clinton and Newt do, and comparing it to something like that, it changes your relationship to what you’re seeing happening before your eyes.

MC: It’s insight we’re seeking.

LS: Yeah, for instance, you know, I live in a state [Texas] that kills more people every year than any other. And we live in a country that right now, kills more people legally than any other in the West. Well, what is that? We talk about Aztecs and sacrifice, what the hell are we doing? We’re sacrificing people for a perceived public good, but it’s no different than what the Aztecs did, absolutely no different. It just depends what words you put up. We call it crime and punishment, and that makes it okay. We call what they did sacrifice and that doesn’t make it okay. It just depends on the point of view you take.

DL: Freedom fighters and terrorists....

MC: Linda, let’s go back to really early history: how you got interested in, how you moved from Tennessee into the art world, and got interested in things that are aesthetic and creative? Were you—from to school, to college, to beyond...?

LS: Yeah, I was always an artist. My parents sent me to the University of Cincinnati to do commercial art. After the first year, I had a big discussion with them, that I wanted to go into fine arts. They finally agreed to let me do it, as long as I would take a degree in education where I could earn a living if I had to, you know. So, I got a BFA. I had had a really fine English teacher, in college, that I fell in love with, and fell in love with literature. And so, I got into the graduate program in English at the University of Connecticut, and discovered my great love of literature was really the man, not the literature. [laughs] So, I didn’t last a whole semester, and I went to Boston to live for a year, and was a piping draftsman for Electric Boat. And after a year in Boston, I fled back to Cincinnati, and, the following year entered an MFA program and married my husband at the end of the second year. And we thought he was going to have to go to Vietnam, so I took the first job that came up, and that was in Mobile, Alabama. So, I ended up teaching art at the University of South Alabama.

DL: What kind of cultural environment did you grow up in? What was your very first exposure to art and literature?

LS: Oh, I grew up in a typical Depression family. My father was from a family of farmers in Missouri and my mother was from a family of moonshiners in east Tennessee. They grew up in the ‘30s, and what they wanted more than anything else was what the generation that fought the war wanted. They wanted their children to go to college and to have a better life than they did. And so, they weren’t cultural. They were fairly redneck.

I always had problems with them, because of course, they educated me; I became relatively liberal compared to their politics. And that was always a source of tension in the family.

DL: You grew up in a pretty much white, redneck culture. What was your first exposure to any other culture?

LS: When I went to college.

DL: Where was that?

LS: Well, the University of Cincinnati, it was mid-western, rather than southern. Any college exposes people to lots of different kinds of experience, and lots of different ways of thinking. That's what us college professors are supposed to do. We're supposed to take those little brains out of their head, turn them upside down, squeeze them and put them back in. That got done to me quite well.

### **Literacy and the role of writing among the ancient Maya**

MC: I want to get on a completely different subject, Linda. Back to what we know about the glyphs today, and what we know about the Maya. To what degree do you suppose—this is probably impossible to answer—the Maya population in, say, 800 AD or 750 AD, at the height of the civilization, to what degree was that a literate population? Who could read, and who didn't read? To whom were these inscriptions addressed, and to whom were they forbidden, if we know such a thing? Was there a difference with the inscriptions that you find in the outdoors, where everybody could see them, versus those that are found in confined spaces that were only really available to the absolute top of the society?

LS: Well, I probably hold an opinion in this area that's different than most other epigraphers. There's one inscription at Tamarindito, after the kings was exiled, that talks about the defeat of the 'itzat winik', of the knowledgeable people, and I think that probably was the name for the nobility, not just for the royalty, but for the nobility. And so, I'm of the opinion that as with the Aztecs, being able to do poetry, being able to do calligraphy, being able to command knowledge and books, was part of what it was to be a noble.

And I've had another experience that's really, really interesting. I wanted to make bars and dots, and actually began trying to manipulate their arithmetic, using their bars and dots. I never got around to it, but a young Maya named, Pakal Balam, did. And so, I bought some bars and dots from him, and then, I made some really good ones. And Nikolai and I began teaching Maya how to count with bars and dots, how to do the

arithmetic. We didn't figure out division too well, but multiplication is a miracle. What we discovered is, you don't have to be literate to use the mathematics in an extremely sophisticated way. We've taught 70-year-old people that neither read nor write Spanish, or their own languages, how to count and do multiplication in the system in 15 minutes. So, I think anybody who could pick up some stones and sticks could do fairly sophisticated addition!

The other thing we discovered about bars and dots, which is really neat, is they're public. Like if you're in a market, and you're negotiating for so many beans for so many things, the addition and subtraction, and all that, is a public act that everybody can see. If somebody makes a mistake they can catch it. I think, that most adult people, and probably a lot of the kids, could handle the bars and the dots, and I think that most of them could follow the calendar. I think that basically illiterate people can keep track of the calendar and can do divination without any kind of writing. There's no reason to think that the same thing wasn't true in the Classic period.

Now, if you move from the nobles downward in the social structure, I don't know. But I suspect now, that the Maya had the equivalent of a *pochteca* group. Whether or not these commercial people, who probably went from city to city during festivals and so forth, and maybe even went to Teotihuacan, and to other parts of Mesoamerica—whether or not they were noble or not, we got no way of telling, 'cause we haven't been able to identify what they looked like yet. But, I suspect they would have had access to literacy, and perhaps, to specialized artists. Certainly the people who did the pottery were literate, or at least who painted it were literate.

MC: One thing that's always puzzled me, and I don't know the answer to that myself—although, I've got some ideas—is that given all of the fractiousness and belligerency between one Maya polity and the next, and yet, intellectually speaking, and even iconographically, and ideologically speaking, there's one Maya culture, during Classic times, that spread all over the Maya area. How do you suppose that was maintained that way? I mean, when innovations would come up, how could they spread if everybody was battling with everybody else all the time?

LS: Well, you know, I don't know. That's a good question. Part of it may have been that they're not battling 16-front wars. They're in alliance. Some neighbors are enemies, some neighbors are not enemies, and the status of enemy or ally can change fairly rapidly. I suspect that, like in 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century Greece, there were times, especially the great festivals, the calendar provided times when travel was protected and expected. And that in these great cycles of feasts—I've always thought—well, we've talked about Bali. I think Bali is a great example of how a very complex calendar can be used not only to keep track of days, but to control all sorts of social mechanisms.

And, we know that the Maya had a calendar that's made up of interlocked circles of different sizes, and their anniversaries were set at many different points on those circles. They had sets of anniversaries that had to do with creation of the world. They had sets of anniversaries that had to do with the myths of the gods. They had sets of anniversaries that had to do with the founding of their own cities. They accumulated a linear string of history, like, old Texas here is in the in-between. We celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> of July *and* the 16<sup>th</sup> of September, right? One's a Mexican Independence day, the other one's American Independence day. So, you can have a linear string of history of special events that accumulate in local or regional history, you could also have it based upon dynastic history and upon family history. I suspect that the festival and the feast cycles of all of these cities were extremely complex, that the feast and festival days were extremely numerous, and that they were interlocked. And I'd be willing to bet you just the way it is today with the saint's day, that a lot of people come into those towns during those festivals, and that's when a lot of the trading was done.

MC: What about pilgrimages to cult sites, like Naj Tunich, the Naj Tunich cave, where we have epigraphic evidence that people were making visits—ceremonial pilgrimage visits to this place. Do you suppose they were somehow or another protected and beyond the outside the ordinary...

LS: Well, the 16<sup>th</sup> century would tell us that they were, because they had pilgrimages like that to Izamal and Cozumel, you know, pilgrimage sites all over northern Yucatán. Yeah, I bet you that, that was—and I bet you in time, that we'll find out the signals they carry. Because, in my own way of thinking, these very probably had special costumes or maybe banners or things like that, that such groups carried, as passports.

MC: It would have been the perfect time for intellectual interchange between these different groups of intellectuals, of scribes, mathematicians, astronomers. You know, to spread information—exchange it.

LS: And the other thing that we know from the inscriptions regarding Site Q and Calakmul, is that the children of subordinate lords were sent to the capitals to be educated. And so, the educational system may also have provided another way that spread, and kept knowledge up to date and uniform.

MC: That's something that we wish we knew more about, there's no doubt about it.

[break, adjust microphone]

MC: Let's talk about the accessibility of the inscriptions. To whom were they accessible, and who saw what?

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LS: I think that it's fairly clear that inscriptions and imagery that was put into the great public spaces, into the courts and the plazas, were designed to be seen by fairly large segments of the population, who came into those courts during ritual and feasting and so forth. In many cases the monuments that are put outside in public space have shorter inscriptions, and they have inscriptions that tend to have more – at least it's my impression – that they have more logographs and a lower percentage of phoneticism in them, than inscriptions that are put inside buildings.

Now, for buildings there's a whole range of different things. I mean, if you think about Yaxchilan and the lintels, those could be seen from below, but they certainly couldn't have been read. To read those you would have to get on your back or squat down under the door. The inscription panels from Palenque, inside the temples, I don't think anyone but very special people would have been allowed up into the temple. I don't think there were guards.

I find myself, when I go into Europe, or I can remember when I was in Jerusalem, I had trouble walking down a lot of the streets, because they look like alleys to me. And alleys are private spaces for us. They're places that you don't walk into, unless you're invited. And, I think that's the sort of thing that went on there. Everyone in the society knew that the Gods lived up in the temples, and you didn't go up there unless you had reason to. But, we've observed that in those big tablets, there are tricks that they set up, so that a reader who has scanned down two columns will be able to find the next one that he's supposed to read. They'll often split known phrases, or they'll make sure that there's a date down at the bottom, and there's a distance number at the top. There's all sorts of tricks that they use, and I think those things were read out loud. They were read to a prepared public in the middle of rituals and reenactments and all sorts of things. When they're read, of course, the problem of phoneticism is not a big thing, because the guy who's reading them will be literate. And then books—it's interesting—the books, I'm not sure. They have a very high degree of phoneticism in them, but they're so repetitious, that I'm not so sure that you would have had to have been a specialist in literature in order to read those.

MC: A lot of specialists in Old World literatures, and especially going into Classical times and earlier, think that silent reading, which is what we do generally, unless we're in a schoolroom, that that's quite late. In Ancient Greece and in Ancient Rome, and the Old World in general, even prior to Classic times, everything was read out loud. People read out loud, silent reading is something recent. Perhaps the Maya aren't so different from the Old World people in this.

LS: Well, it's interesting. Nikolai has identified in the Dresden-- there's some debate over it, but I think it's going to end up being a good reading-- he's identified a verb that begins the Dresden that's 'peka', and 'peka' (?) means to recite, but it also means to read.

MC: So, there's really no difference for the Maya between oral literature and written literature.

LS: I would suspect not, yeah.

### **Various figures in Maya studies, including Eric Thompson, Heinrich Berlin, Floyd Lounsbury, Mike Coe and Nikolai Grube**

MC: Now, I'd like to move, Linda, to your view, sort of, a long view of a man who was probably the most powerful and influential Maya scholar of the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and that was John Eric Sydney Thompson, who gave so much, but who also stopped so much that's important to us. A sort of, a man with a dual nature, as far as we're concerned, now. First of all, to get you to talk about—how did Morley's and Thompson's view of the Maya world arise, and how was it superseded?

LS: I'm not sure, myself, it's fair to put Morley and Thompson in the same bag. I've done work during the last 3 or 4 years on the Chilam Balams, connecting the histories of the 'katuns' in the several books—in the Tizimin and the Chumayel—to Classic Maya history, and you can lock them together, that's why I say Maya history is unbroken until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I did a lot of Morley, before Brainard got ahold of his work, and his own work was the Chilam Balams, which I think it's the best available, that he did with Barrera Vasquez—which I think is the best work, the best translation and the best translation that's been done of the Chilam Balam histories. Morley, from 1911 on, actually believed in history. And his early works and his analysis of the ongoing history, even to some degree, his Old Empire-New Empire stuff isn't far off. I mean, it's—considering that he couldn't read the inscriptions, he was awfully close to having the key.

If you read the original *Ancient Maya*, this one [the first edition] doesn't have all that stuff in it. I mean, he really talks about government. He talks about warfare. He gets pretty close to it being a history. I think that his work got changed later by the authors that rewrote it. My big argument with Morley, is that he didn't understand anything but the calendar. So, the drawings and everything that he did for his great publications just were of the dates. He didn't give us any of the other stuff, which is of course, the really great stuff with the history in it.

Thompson, I don't really know. I think that Thompson may have been affected by living through two world wars. And his own experience with Maya communities—see, Morley, this is interesting, Morley's greatest contact with the Maya was through the Cruzob. The Cruzob were militant and they're armed, and they gave Mexico a lot of trouble. Most of

the contact that Thompson had was in Belize, in British Honduras, where the communities were not under threat, and they weren't so militant. And so, that idea of a peaceable kingdom, I think, may have come out of Thompson's direct experience with the Maya, but I think, one of the things he was forgetting is he was dealing with a people that had been suppressed violently for 500 years. I'm not so anti-Thompson as many people. I think that his contributions to ethnography, and to ethnohistory, and to talking about the gods, and all of that is a real major, major foundation for our field. He's just one of those people that put his eggs in the wrong basket. To me, I don't blame him. Yeah, he shot down Knorosov, but you know what happened when he shot down Knorosov, Mike, it's just like the archaeologists with epigraphy today. Most of the people that are not accepting it and are attacking it, won't learn enough to test out whether it works or not. I blame the other people. Thompson had a wonderful way with words, and he could crush, and he did crush Knorosov. But, how come it was only you, Floyd, and Dave Kelley who actually tested the original work to see if it would work. Everybody else just accepted his word and threw it out. Now I don't think that's Thompson's fault. That's the field's fault.

MC: There's a lot of follow-the-leader in the field.

LS: Yeah, and as professional scholars, we should be responsible for making our own judgments.

MC: How did you meet Heinrich Berlin?

LS: Oh, that's a wonderful story. It was at the 1974 International Congress in Mexico. And Dave Kelley, who was a great friend of Heinrich Berlin's, called him up, and said that he had to meet me and Peter. And then, Heinrich said, "Okay." So, we went to his office, and went down to a Turkish Restaurant, or maybe it was an Arab restaurant, but it was a restaurant right under his office. He sat us down in front of him and said, "Okay, you have a half an hour each. Who's going to start?" So, I sort of started, and asked him some questions about archaeology that he had published, and he really went up one side and down the other side of me for not having done my homework. And I said, "Okay, okay."

And then, Peter started asking him questions, and we ended up staying there for about two and a half hours, three hours, talking about Chan Bahlum, whom he had missed, Chan Bahlum, and talking about Pakal and the age problem. This was before Alberto Ruz Luhliller really attacked us. And, I'll never forget. Berlin had this little tiny demitasse cup of coffee, and he put four heaping spoonfuls of sugar as he sat there. And as he drank this ultra-sweet coffee he said, "I just can't believe someone 80 years old had teeth that good. I've had trouble with my teeth my whole life!" [laughter]

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It was really nice, because I stayed friends with Berlin, and went to see him every time I went to Mexico City, and exchanged things with him. He, for instance, wrote a real good review of “Parentage”, after the *bodega* was done. Tania never wanted anything to do with me, but she was real good friends with Peter. So between the two of us, we managed to have both “greats”.

MC: When you were talking with Heinrich Berlin, did you use the word—on that first meeting—the word Pakal, because that’s, of course, a phonetic—that came through a phonetic reading of his logographic name. Berlin never seemed to me to be terribly interested in phoneticism. Did you get on to that at all with him?

LS: Yeah, I think, probably we did use Chan Bahlum and Pakal. Certainly, we would have later on. He actually, before he died, sort of confessed to me that – seeing the material that we were presenting – that he would have had to accept phoneticism. But that he was too old and just couldn’t learn a new thing. And I’ve thought that’s a wonderful contrast to Floyd, ‘cause Floyd and Berlin were fairly close to the same age. Floyd said the same thing. He said, “I know the Codices, and I’m too old to learn anything else.” Then he proceeds to bust apart Palenque’s inscriptions in the last 20 years of his career. Floyd’s my hero. I’ve always tried to be like Floyd, if I can.

MC: I agree.

DL: Could you talk a minute about Floyd, while we’re here, and just about what his strengths were, and what he brought to the decipherment?

LS: Well, Floyd Lounsbury—the most important characteristic about him is that he’s utterly open and he doesn’t care about rank or where people are from, or anything like that. So, he was perfectly willing to collaborate with Merle and me and Peter and Dave. That’s the first thing. The second thing is that Floyd was one of the best linguists in the world. He was a structural linguist. He had studied Yucatec. He had studied Tzotzil. He understands how languages work around the world, and he was also a trained mathematician, and so underlying Floyd’s work was always controlled logic. The logic was not always correct, and Floyd was able to let go when the logic led him in the wrong place.

Let me give you an example of what Floyd would do. Peter and I, back about—I guess it would have been 1975 and ’76-- were in his seminar room with him, deciding all of the specialized terms that we were going to use for glyphs that were phonetic, versus their meaning, versus something else. I can’t even remember the structures we did then. This was during the time when Dave’s book came out. He wanted to talk about gliders instead of glyphs, and Peter and I labored, and labored, and labored, and labored, for at least two and a half hours, and finally after we had these columns of specialized terms we were



going to use Floyd in exasperation went, “Oh, this is operating against natural language, no one will use this. Everyone uses the general term, and if you want to specify it you add an adjective. This is useless.” And Peter and I just sat there and said, “Okay.” And I’ve never worried about specialized terms about glyphs ever since. And that’s what Floyd always did. He always brought us down to earth. He always provided the structural information that Peter and me, and the rest of us needed to control and sort of level off our wild flights. He’s also an expert on kinship, and so that also contributed.

MC: A younger scholar, of course, the youngest of all scholars at one point, is David Stuart. And you had a lot to do with setting him off in the right direction as a very, very young person into this field. Can you say something about that, Linda, about how you first ran across David. I mean, you were an enormously important formative influence on him.

LS: Yeah. It would have been, I guess, the late ‘70s again, when George and Jeanne were driving down to Coba to do field work, and they drove through Mobile, and they stopped. We had breakfast and George started showing me—David was 8 by then—and George started showing me drawings of Coba that David had done in the book the year before, and was showing his drawings of some of the Coba inscriptions which were pretty good for an 8-year-old. That introduced me to David. And a couple of years later, when I was in Washington, walking to lunch with George and Jeanne. George said something, that they would really appreciate it, if there was ever a chance, that if David could go with me to Mexico, or study with me or something. And so on the spur of the moment, I said, “Why doesn’t he come down to Palenque this summer?”

And they talked about it, and then Jeanne came with him to Palenque. He would have been probably 10, then. I had hurt myself playing volleyball, and didn’t particularly want to deal with a 10-year-old, so I gave him, I think it was the Tablet of the Cross, told him to go out on the back porch and figure out as much as he could about it. He puzzled away, and would come in every once in a while and ask a question, and puzzle away, and puzzle away. I, of course, directed him—got him around areas that, I knew were deadfalls. But he came back a couple of days later, and had the same amount of structural understanding of the text that had taken me, and Peter, and Floyd, and Dave Kelley three years to do. And so, I figured then that he was really quite good. And I think, the next Mesa Redonda, Merle asked him to present a paper. That was the little one he presented at [age] 13 on Piedras Negras. And during his teenage years, after awhile, they let him travel with me without one of them along. So, he, in 1979, sat in on the course I taught at UNAM. He sat side by side with me to learn linguistics from Nicholas and Kathryn, and went to conferences with me. My big problem was getting all of the old fogies, scholars, to accept having this young boy in there, and getting them to realize that he was understanding what they were saying, and that they should not treat

him like a brat, but treat him like a colleague. And he gradually went on to college and made other friendships and so forth.

MC: When he was in, of course, Princeton he wrote as a senior thesis the first really big study of Maya artists, from the ethnographic point of view.

LS: Yeah, he had presented the reading 'ah tzib' at the conference for the opening for the *Blood of Kings* in 1986. That always happens with the book, Mike. You know that, right? Great discovery! The one that would have been the key to the book is made 2 months after it's published, right!

### **Epigraphy and archaeology at Copán**

MC: That's right. Now, we talked in the past about--a lot of us actually--about the kind of conflict that arose, mainly on their part, between the dirt archaeologists and the rest of us who are interested in epigraphy and iconography, and yet, there have been projects, in recent years, that have been wonderful collaborations between the archaeologists who are excavating, and epigraphers, and iconographers and linguists. Of course, Copán is a wonderful example of that. Could you tell us something about your experiences in that.

LS: Well, the Copán project started by Bill Fash back in the mid-'80s, 1986, with the idea that it would be collaborative, and that he would bring many, many different specialists in, but include epigraphers and iconographers who would work the material, not only what was already known... At the time, in 1986, there was a partial dynastic history known. But only the latest of the rulers had been identified. The earlier ones had not.

So basically, David Stuart and I joined the project, to make sure the drawings were accurate, and to try and provide epigraphic context for what was going on. My interaction in that project has been actually long term, less with Bill, and more with Bob Sharer. Because I've been with them in the tunnels, deep under the east court and under Temple 16 where there have been a lot of critical inscriptions that have had, like the dedication dates of buildings, and the dedication dates of stairs on them. And it's been a kind of wonderful debate, because of course, they're not going to date the buildings only on epigraphic data. They want a cluster of information, like radiocarbon. They want information that they can get from pottery. There's very careful stratigraphy done. There's obsidian hydration that's done. What they want is a cluster of cross-confirming sets of data. But one of the interesting things about it, if you deal with radiocarbon, the best you're ever going to get on radiocarbon is a plus or minus 50 years. The best you're ever going to get on obsidian hydration is plus or minus who knows how many years. On pottery, it's even grosser, because the chronology of the pottery at Copán are in big, long

200 year hunks. So, it ended up that, although we argued like mad over it for many years, wonderful, lovely arguments, the inscriptions are the finest cut on the chronology.

And in Copán, we have had the most stunning experience – David and I, back in 1986 – identifying the founder. Identifying all sorts of things about him. It's not just David and I, but Nikolai and I have done a lot of work on this too, because accounts of these foundings were also at Quiriguá, so, the two sites are crossing over. In the last 5 years, they have found the tomb of the founder.

In 1986, the archaeologists were saying that there wasn't enough population in the valley to have elite rulers. They called our kings from the Early Classic, "putative kings". Now, ten years later, that "putative" founder has bones and two extraordinary tombs associated with him. To me, [Copán is] the most important, single point of archaeology, right now, in the Americas, because it's the only place where we have the account of a founding, we have the actual people who were the founders, their bones. And we have the archaeology of the actual founding events.

MC: The really amazing thing is that here the Maya epigraphers, much maligned by some archaeologists, were the ones who predicted what was going to be there and low and behold, archaeology has confirmed that they honestly did live, and were there.

DL: Could you tell that story in a little more detail. How that came about?

LS: Well, it was the story I just told you. The epigraphers used the inscriptions in the mid-1980s to 1990, to reconstruct a dynastic history, and to identify people who were part of it. We had detailed—relatively detailed, and relatively long accounts of the founding events. And these events were recorded on monuments, much later than the events, but recorded by the 16<sup>th</sup> king at Copán, and by his contemporary at Quiriguá. The archaeologists, through their tunneling, have actually reached the levels, under the Acropolis where that man is buried, and where those events occurred. I mean, literally. They have the archaeology.

I, sometimes to my colleagues dismay, started in 1986 a series of field notes called the "Copán Notes". And they were informally done. They were distributed informally. We sent out 50 courtesy copies, and then they were put at Kinko's, so anybody who wanted to get them could. All of the predictions are written in the "Copán Notes." I mean, they exist in print and they're circulated.

DL: Did the inscriptions predict where the founder would be found, as well as that the tomb existed?

BREAKING THE MAYA CODE  
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LS: Essentially, yeah, because there is one very famous monument, very famous monument called Altar Q at Copán, which shows 16 figures around the edge. This was taken by Morley, and other people, early in the century, to be an astronomers conference, and that myth still floats in the air. It is in fact – I think Joyce Marcus was the first one really to suggest it – it's a dynasty of 16 rulers. In the inscriptions, back in 1985, '84, '83, many of the epigraphers who were working on the inscriptions kept finding this name that was made up of a quetzal bird and a macaw bird. And everybody who worked with it, you know Floyd, Gary Paul, everybody thought that it was a Late Classic king.

About that time, Peter Mathews came up with a title which designates numbered successions. They're counts of lords, you know, first lord, second lord, third lord, fourth lord. We had a whole set of those of Copán, that said, you know, "Tenth successor," and then it would have this glyph with the quetzal bird and the macaw. Finally, it occurred to me and David – David is actually the first one that did it. He figured out the dates that were associated with this man were very early, instead of very late. So that was the first breakthrough. He's early.

And then, I will never forget the day that I was taking a group of Earth Watchers around, squatted in front of the beginning of this series of 16 figures, and looked at the bird that was on the back of the first figures head and realized that I could see the little dots of the macaw eye. And I just stood up—David was drawing across the court, and wasn't with the Earth Watchers, but I just stood up and screamed, "David come here!" And he came over, and I showed him the dots and then he looked up on top of the head and said, "My God, there's the 'k'inich'." And in that moment, we recognized that first figure was the founder, and that his name was Yax K'uk Mo.

Now, Alfonso Morales, Moises' second son, had participated in excavations on top of that temple, on Temple 16. And he had found glyphs with Yax K'uk Mo's name, and with the founder's glyph, on the top of that building. And Barbara – Barbara Fash, Bill's wife – had shown that a figure that was on the west side of the temple, in the interior, that Maudslay had drawn in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, was a man wearing a quetzal-macaw headdress and feather cape.

And so everything just accumulated, that that axis under the temple was likely to be an incredibly important axis. And during the next several years, as the Honduran archaeologist, Ricardo Argucia, was digging inside of it, he found a complete 2-story temple with all the stucco still on it. And Karl Taube identified that the birds around the base of it were Yax K'uk Mos. And so, David Sedat, of the Penn projects, not of the Honduras projects, had been coming in towards the same axis another 30 feet down, and from a different direction. And he's the one that found the deep buildings with the tombs in them.

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MC: QED.

DL: A couple of other folks I would like to ask you about, your work with and your relationship with. The first one was a question that I asked Mike last night, and he didn't know the answer. How did you first meet Mike Coe, and how did you get to know him?

LS: At the First Mesa Redonda. Mike was the—you don't know this story, and you probably won't use it, but you were the moderator of my session, and I presented my little thing on comparing the Temple of the Inscriptions to the Group of the Cross, and you got up afterwards and said very nice things, including comparing me to Tania. And I got that on tape, and at home a friend of mine erased the tape. I met him at the First Mesa Redonda. You were really good friends with Betty Benson, and you were I think on the board of Dumbarton Oaks at that time, weren't you?

MC: I was advising.

LS: Yeah. In 1974, Betty and the board extended an invitation to me to come to Dumbarton Oaks and work with someone that I wanted to. And it was actually—too bad nothing ever came of that, because the person I named was Bob Rands who was the archaeologist, and Bob and I spent 3 months comparing the known archaeology of Palenque to the inscriptions, and came out with a pretty much 100% match. And it never got published.

DL: Could you tell me how you first got to know Nikolai Grube, and what his strengths were in epigraphy, and how your working relationship developed over the years.

LS: Nikolai, as a young student, I guess maybe 18 or 19 came to—completely unexpectedly to one of the Mesa Redondas. I think it would have been the 1986 Mesa Redonda. Nikolai had been working on for a project at Hamburg, where he was a student, on the Primary Standard Sequence, on the pottery. And it ends up that David Stuart had also begun to make some breakthroughs in the substitution patterns, and he and David got together at the Mesa Redonda and did some really spectacular stuff. That was when the Primary Standard Sequence began to break. David and I invited him—we were going to Copán later to work, and I invited him to come to Copán, and if he was in the area to look us up.

And he came. I don't think David was there. I think the first time Nikolai came to Copán—he may have come one year earlier, but the first time he came and we were, sort of, walking around, he and I found the fourth successor, I think it was the fourth successor, in one afternoon, and confirmed it and went home and wrote up a note on who he was and which monuments he was on, and that was very clear that Nikolai was

another one of these people that the collaboration would cause lightning breakthrough, and so he kept coming back.

Then he began coming here to Texas, and then, after he had been coming to Copán for 4 years, and we'd gotten to be really good friends and had written a lot of stuff together, I invited him—because you see, Nikolai began his work working at Señor, learning to speak Yucatec and doing a detailed study of the caste wars by talking to the old people who remember the early part of this century. And he learned Yucatec well enough to go in and tape them talking and transcribe the Yucatec and translate it into Spanish and German. And so, Nikolai was a person—and the only other epigrapher-archaeology type that I knew that worked with Maya. So, in 1990, I said, “You want to come to Antigua and do a workshop with me?” And he said, “Oh yeah.” And he did, and we were great together. So, he's been my partner in these ever since.

MC: One of Nikolai's great decipherments, great breakthroughs, that he shared with several other people, or came simultaneously was the 'way' glyph.

LS: For me that was a really funny situation because I was at a Dumbarton Oaks conference, and David Stuart had actually told me about his and Steve's reading of that glyph at the conference. I came back to Austin, and the next day received a package from Nikolai that had exactly the same reading in it, and also had pages and pages from his field books where he had put the data down. It's one of those situations where the glyph had just been sitting there, teetering, ready for decipherment, and Nikolai on the one hand, and Steve Houston and David Stuart on the other, finally looked at the phonetic compliments and figured out the reading simultaneously and independently. It was a very, sort of, surrealistic moment when I realized I had the two of them.

DL: Could you tell that story for those of us who do not know what the 'way' glyph is?

LS: Well, the 'way' glyph is a glyph that is the image of an 'ahau', sort of, a little monkey face. This is a place where I should be drawing...

[discuss whether to set up to draw; cut and do so.]

Well, the 'way' glyph is a glyph I also worked with, to people's dismay. It is an 'ahau' glyph with half of it covered by jaguar skin. Now, I had worked with this glyph back in the late '70s, and had worked with it being something like Balam Ahau, which means hidden lord, because it was in the names on pots. I thought it made sense that the people on pots were in the underworld, that they were hidden lords. It was an interesting argument. The glyph, though, comes with two signs that are phonetic compliments, and I never worked with them, because first of all, in the late '70s we didn't know what their

values were. But by the early '90s, we knew that the one on the bottom, is 'ya', and there was one over the top that's 'wa'.

I can remember a moment when Dave Kelley asked me, "What is this sign doing on top of it?" And this we knew – from Knorosov, and other people – has the value of 'wa'. I had no idea how to explain it. I said, "Maybe it just goes with the 'ahau'." But there was another suffix that went with it, that in the late '80s, or mid-'80s, we came to find out was 'ya'. Well, what happened when the 'way' glyph was discovered is that on the one hand Nikolai, and on the other hand Steve and David, just simply read the two phonetic compliments which gives you 'wa-y(a)'. And the root, there—you don't read this, you don't pronounce it [points to drawing]—so, the root is *way*. And they went the dictionaries and looked it up. '*Way*' means to sleep; it means to dream; it means to transform into your *nahual*; and it's the word for the spirit companion that shares people's souls that the people called '*way*'. And so, what they were able to show is that many of these creatures or people that show up on the pots are actually '*ways*' who are in transformation. They are these soul-sharing creatures of the other world, and that many of the cities had '*ways*' associates with them, as well as kings.

It's settled a very old debate. Because many of the ethnographers had been saying that *nahualism*, the belief in these soul companions, was European. And here's direct proof that it's Precolumbian. It was a really, really major breakthrough.

MC: It also tied into the ethnographic work that people like Evan Vogt, Vogtie, had been doing with the contemporary Tzotzil Maya.

LS: Right, but there had been a great debate in ethnography about whether *nahualism* was Precolumbian or not, and now there's no question.

MC: Do you think that if, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Abbe Brasseur de Bourbourg had never discovered the Landa Manuscript, we would be able to read the Maya hieroglyphs the way we do?

LS: Boy, that's a hard question. It's possible that we would—The key is understanding that it's syllabic. It's possible that someone like Knorosov, or someone who had come into the field from the Old World syllabic writing systems could have come in and tested it without having Landa. But I think, that we'd be real far behind, compared to where we are, because if you look at what Landa gave us-- he gave us all of the day signs, and the correct order that they go in. He gave us all the month signs, and the correct order they go in. We probably could have figured out the calendar without it, but it would have been very difficult, and we certainly wouldn't have known how to pronounce the day signs. But if you add to just the information on the calendar, his rather delightful A-B-C, and the examples of spelling that he gave, plus the help that he gave to give the Yucatec

pronunciations of the month signs, we have an inventory of 40 or 50 signs with known values. And in fact, the technique that Knorosov used was to go from knowns, to look for contexts in which they occur, to posit values for other signs joined to it, and then, look for contexts in which both of them were, so that one can test out the proposed values of the signs. And having – I don't have in my head a direct count, I think it was something like 45 signs, from Landa, was a huge head start. And so, it's possible the system could have been broken without Landa, but it would have taken a lot longer, and it would have taken a real genius to do it, man.

DL: Was Landa a Rosetta Stone, or a Rosetta Stone that was misconstrued?

LS: Yeah, but the misconstrual was understanding what the misunderstanding was. And as far as I know, Martinez Hernandez is the first one that figured it out – what the misunderstanding was. Landa pronounced the letters for, I guess it was Antonio Gaspar Chi who was the one that did the alphabet. Antonio Gaspar Chi was literate. I mean, he is listed in the list as a *ladino* and a *latino*. He wrote and read Spanish. He wrote and read Latin. So, he knew what was going on. It was Landa that didn't understand what was going on. Landa told him to write the sounds of the Spanish alphabet, and he did. "Ah, be, ce, de, e, efe". And he wrote them—he transcribed the sounds of the Spanish letters into the syllabic system of the Maya. And the people who went back and tried to—until Knorosov—tried to use Landa as a source were trying to make 'em into—I mean, the first one is 'ah' and it's a turtle beak, so they said, "Okay, the work for turtle is 'ahk'. So this has got to be 'ahk'." But when they tried to take the logographic or rebus type of writing out to the other signs, it just fell apart. And people got so frustrated they even suggested it was a hoax. But once you understand what the error was, what the misunderstandings in the two people were, then it makes perfect sense.

MC: One of your earliest major works was of course your Ph.D. thesis on the Maya verbs. What were the—what do you think today, are the most outstanding examples of verbs that epigraphers should know and work with, and what have been some of the more recent discoveries in the way of verbs—action glyphs? How many verbs do you think there are that have been identified, so far?

LS: I don't have a count any more of them. The book "The Verbs" has most of the major data that you need to study the verbs in it, but at the time it was finished, which was 1979, we didn't know the values of a lot of the signs. So the book splits the signs, where now we know that the signs are phonetic equivalents of each other. And so if I were to go back and redo the book there would be a lot of clumping. And so it ends up, that the pattern for verbal suffixing is far more reduced than the study gave the impression of, in the late 1970s. In many ways—yeah, I can't give you a count of the verbs. I mean there are verbs that are actions that have to do with the lives of kings, like birth, 4 or 5 different ways of talking about accession. There are death verbs, verbs that



have to do with people dying, with people being buried, with people being being resurrected. There are verbs that have to do with war, with capture. There's a huge class of verbs that has to do with the dedication and ownership of objects. The verbs will however, I think, remain a primary clue to interpretation of the inscriptions, because the names and the titles are fairly easy to pattern out. The critical information is the action the people are doing, and that's where a lot of breakthroughs are going to be made in the years ahead, is understanding what it is they're actually doing.

DL: In the history of things, over the past 30 years or so, there have been certain verbs, that when they were understood, they sort of, of opened a whole new window, once you knew what that verbs were, into understanding the Maya. Could you give some examples?

LS: Tania's two studies, the great study of Piedras Negras and the great study at Yaxchilan, identified most of the critical ones that have to do with life. She identified birth, although, she called it the "initial glyph." She identified one or two of the inauguration events, which are accession. She identified death, capture, and <unintelligible>. At the time, she didn't posit what they were, in terms, of grammar. She called them action glyphs or something like that. It wasn't until the Dumbarton Oaks group started working that we actually said, "These are verbs."

In Maya, the plain vanilla syntax is a temporal expression, followed by a verb, followed by—if it's an intransitive verb it'll be followed by a subject, if it's a transitive verb it will be followed by an object and then a subject. Once you begin thinking about these things as word order and syntax, rather than as individual floating glyphs, and you begin to put together texts rather than individual components, then the system begins to yield its secrets.

DL: In "Maya Glyphs: The Verbs", you talk about the history of the beginning of the identification of verbs and sort of, the stages of how that happened. I think you go back as far as De Rosny and Thomas first identifying verbs—

LS: In the codices.

DL: ..and then, point out that Schellhas, by identifying Gods, allowed us to begin to see who the subjects—could you talk about—the very early stages of beginning to see what were things?

LS: Oh Jesus. I don't have—that was research. I don't carry that stuff in my brain all the time about who did what.

The decipherment has always operated from the viewpoint of pattern. The earliest breakthroughs in the codices had to do with associating patterns that appeared in the glyphs with patterns that appeared in the pictures. The people, at the time they were doing it, weren't using the technical jargon of linguistics. They were just calling them "action verbs", "the name of the god". But if you step away from that, just like the utterance that I'm giving now, we cannot communicate without grammar and word order, and the pattern of syntax. I also wrote – I think it was in *Forest of Kings*—that one of the criticisms that Thompson gave against Knorosov was, if Knorosov was right, then it would be like a dam bursting, then, everything would start just flowing out. Well, that's exactly what happened when the final component was added to the system. And the final component was word order and syntax, and that's what the Mini-Conferences added to this mix of things. Once that was added in, it just opened up like a flood, and it went so fast that we couldn't keep up with it. It's still going so fast that people that aren't in the circuit can't keep up with it.

DL: I'd like to step back from the detail of the verbs, and look from the broadest way at the nature of the text, of the writing system. In the *Blood of Kings* you say that "The hieroglyphic system was a truly functioning writing capable of recording every nuance of the spoken language." How do we know this?

LS: Because we have examples of it now. I mean, we not only have examples where not only all of the grammar is there, but we have examples of what are called morphophonemics, where the particular pronunciation pattern of a particular region shows up in the spelling of the glyphs. Just as Antonio Gaspar Chi did with Landa, recording the sounds of the Spanish alphabet, they could record any sound they wanted to. They could make the writing as precisely locked to phonetics or as general on phonetics as they wanted.

You see, there are all sorts of levels of phonetics. I see this going on in the Maya today, who are in the process of creating, for themselves, their own alphabetic system that will be used in their own publications. And they have linguists, trained Mayan linguists, who are in the process of doing this. Well, right now, what many of them are doing is they are recording utterance, with such detailed phonetics that they are recording the particular accent of a village. Well, that level of phonetics, it may be of interest to a linguist, but it adds enormous difficulty to an operational writing system, right. It's too much information. The writing system has to operate for all of the dialects of a language, not just for one, and I think what's going to happen in time is they're going to back off, and not record these subtle differences, like the difference between my accent and Mike's accent, okay. I'm a southerner. That level of English doesn't need to be recorded.

The glyphs do the same thing. The glyphs, when the writer wanted to, could exactly reproduce what was being uttered, but most of the time they back off of that very fine

level. Like they can spell the word ‘tah’ which means torch with the H on it, without the H on it.

DL: How is this script similar to other scripts in the world, and how is it unique? Is it unique in any way, or is it like all other scripts, basically?

LS: It falls into the family of what we call logosyllabic scripts. It has signs in it that record whole words, and it has signs in it that record syllables. And the scribes combine the two of these in many diverse ways. There is a visual – iconic, if you will – component of Maya writing. I’m not talking of the beauty of calligraphy. The Maya had this incredible graphic sense where they could represent the same sign as an abstract sign, as a head variant, as a full figured variant, or as a combination of those in many ways. The art of the system is the genius within which they combine all these different possibilities.

The only other script that has this enormous pictorial content that was retained in it is Egyptian. But Egyptian, as far as I’m concerned, is stiff and limited, constricted in the way the signs interact with the visual field. The graphic component in Maya writing is absolutely overwhelming, and in fact, much of the problems that epigraphers have is detecting when signs that look different are actually variants of the same sign. Because the head variant and the full figured variant don’t have to look like the abstract variant. The only way you get it is through substitution patterns.

DL: A word that comes to me in relation to this is play, which wouldn’t come to me in relation to the Egyptian, that there’s a lot of playing – the calligraphers trying different things.

LS: Well, it’s playing, but the art involves a level of graphic imagination and expertise that is unparalleled. As far as I know, it’s unparalleled in any other writing system in the world including Egyptian. And, one of the neat things that happens to epigraphers is we get giggles when we discover some of the little strange things and the games they’re playing with it—they did play games. It’s very serious. Now, you can’t present that this kind of play is irreverent.

DL: What I was asking about play had to do with word play, looking at the inscriptions it seemed beyond rebus, that there is word play and punning going on. You mentioned somewhere the punning is greatly respected among the modern Maya. Do you feel like that?

LS: Control of discourse. No, I don’t think so. I think this is something that’s really important for us to understand. We have a tradition of art in which we value creativity, in which we value creativity and individual uniqueness above all else. I know because I’ve

been a teacher of studio [art], and every single one of those young studio people want to do something no body's ever seen before. The Maya live in a totally different way of thinking about art does and about what artistic tradition is.

For instance, I had a great talk with Chip Morris, who lived with the Tzotziles for many years, about weavers. Now, in our society, we think about the people who do innovation, who "push the box", who change things, as being our young people. Us old people are supposed to be stodgy and, you know, trapped in our minds, and unable to adapt. In Tzotzil society, the great weavers are not the young people, they are the middle aged people in their 50s and late 40s who have learned their craft so well, that what they do is begin to play with the edges. And they push the edges of what they can do.

I think innovation was like that during the Classic Period too, that it is the masters, the people who have spent their entire lives learning craft who push the edges. But more than that, in our world, when we think about poets, and so forth, we think about what's said as being the crucial element of creativity. Well, for the Maya, what was said is basically controlled by tradition. It's not the way the words were arranged that's made with art, it's the way they were graphically displayed. It is the repetition within it, the couplets, the triplets. It's the imagination with which particular signs are chosen, the beauty with which particular strokes are put into it, that's what's stunning about the Maya literary tradition.

The same thing happens in the Old World, Gilgamesh, the Iliad and the Odyssey, you know. These things are things that are repeated over and over. It's like Shakespeare. No one changes the words of Shakespeare. It's the way it's performed that gives you the art. That's the way Maya art was.

## **Maya cosmology and worldview compared with that of the "modern" world**

DL: I would like to move on to the notion of the relationship between the image and the text. In our culture, pictures are things that hang in museums and writing is something that happens in books, they're very separate things. In Maya they seemed to be intermeshed. Could you talk about how that intermeshing takes place?

LS: If you look at the history of Maya art, and you go back to its earliest levels, what you get is you get great huge building facades that have large, very complex mask programs mounted on the terraces of the platforms. In the earliest imagery, you don't have picture of kings, and you don't have writing. Except as writing can come into these things as small icons that tag things. The way the art was used is that it is the backdrop and the sanctifying context for ritual performance.

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Now, there is a relationship between Maya art and our own history of art. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century – if Mike had been able to go talk to Brasseur he could have taken notes, but he wouldn't have had, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the possibility of having a camera like [yours] that can record performance in a permanent media. Or if you think about orchestras, great performances of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we don't have them, but we can listen to performances of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century because the technology existed.

Well, there is a relationship very much like that in Maya art. Because by, say, 100 AD, perhaps a little bit earlier, the Maya borrowed a format called a stela, a large upright stone, often with an altar in front of it, and they began to place images onto these stelae. Now, the images have been treated often like they're portraits, but they're not portraits in the sense that our artistic tradition does portraits of somebody just sitting there—like you're doing a portrait of me now, right. These are portraits of *ritual*. They are actually images of a crucial point in a ritual sequence where a ruler, or a ruler and companions are performing certain critical acts that are necessary for the public good. Now, the image shows the ruler, shows the action, shows the supernatural context. It can show the 'ways', if there are any 'ways'. It can show gods coming into the scene. It can show all sorts of things like that.

What the writing gives you is the time of the event, the precise action that occurs, the person who's doing the action, and if it's a long text, then what the text will establish is historical context for the action, and religious context for the action, and political context for the action. So that people who come up and address these images, can come up to them in much the same way that we watch Hitler taking Paris—you know, the French surrender in the same rail car that the Germans signed the armistice in 1918. That's a historical event that we see replayed over and over. Well, that's exactly the way these people went to these monuments. They're going to the monuments, not to see what Bird Jaguar looked like, they're going to the monuments to see Bird Jaguar scattering, or to see Bird Jaguar involved with a certain event with his father. These are the confirmation of historical validity, historical actuality. And once they existed in the public space of a city, they continued to affect history. They became a part of the historical string.

DL: Within those monuments when you have an inscription and you have the image, often the image functioned in a way much like the writing. There are elements of writing within the image, and there are elements of images in the writing. Those things are going back and forth.

LS: Well, yeah, it's a profound interaction. The Maya, when they showed one of these guys in the midst of the ritual, were treating them the same way we would treat, say, an image of Schwarzkopf and the Gulf War. I mean, all of the stuff that's being worn on the collars, on the head, gives critical information about ritual, rank, name, the god that's

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being called up, all of this crucial information. And they used the writing system as tags, going in and out of the picture exactly the same as Schwartzkoff, US Army, right—words incorporated into symbols that mark people and tell you who they are what's going on. And they're read just that way.

[cut for break]

MC: Your work and that of Dave Freidel's on the Maya cosmos and the moment of the creation of the universe, from the Maya point of view, has certain similarities to what physicists are after, with the big bang and black holes and things of that nature. Could you comment on that, Linda?

LS: The Maya story of creation, if we take it from the Popol Vuh, starts with gods uttering words and manifesting the physical existence of the universe. In the Popol Vuh story-- and I think it's Classic Period, too, in fact, I think we can push it back to the Olmec-- there are 4 recreations of the world, and we're living in the 4<sup>th</sup>. Other Mesoamerican people have us in the 5<sup>th</sup>, but the Maya had us in the 4<sup>th</sup>. For me, the important thing about this is that human beings, in order to understand how they relate to creation and what they are as human beings, generate explanations of what creation was. And for me, the Big Bang, which was supposedly 15 billion years ago, is a parallel activity to what the Maya did when their Gods created the world 142 nonillion years ago.

The May use *story*. Our sciences tell us that they're using mathematics and scientific method, and other sorts of devices that give them an ability to see the truth, whereas what the Maya talked about, was simply superstition. I once had [Nobelist in physics Steven] Weinburg look at me in disgust, and say, "But the Milky Way is not a canoe!"

The advantage to me of stories, like what the Maya used, and the painting onto the patterns of the stars and the Milky Way of images of these great narratives, is you don't have to be a Ph.D. to understand it. You could be a child and understand it and learn it through stories. In our world, to access that, you either have to be one of the scientists who creates the legend of the Big Bang, or you have to be one of the scientific writers who act as translators for the people in our world. The thing that I've tried to get the people like Carl Sagan and Weinburg and other people to understand is that when they deal with bubble universes--, which is the latest one, right, before the Big Bang, there's bubble universes-- is their mental activity, and their creation of metaphor to try and explain their understanding to us, is an activity that's no different than what the Maya do. Or any other people in the world. And that it does us no good to delegate worldviews like the Maya to the realm of superstition and child's stories that have no value to us. I suspect, that in time, there will be physicists who will look back on the Big Bang with a grin and call it myth.

Now, I don't know if that's what you were after. Is that what you were after?

MC: That's what I was after.

[discussion break. Linda asks to make a final statement.]

LS: In my work with the Maya, over the last 10 years, it's been made very clear to me, that one of the most precious gifts that any group of humans on the earth has is history. It's a gift that gives identity, it's a gift that places people in time, it's a gift that gives people resilience, it gives them examples of how to cope, it gives them identity.

For me, the last 25 years have been a kind of magic time. You can't describe to other people when you've participated in the recovery of a lost history, and instead of these sites being anonymous, unexplained, mysterious places, they become the context of history. And we can talk about not only the people who commissioned the buildings, often the people who painted the great objects, the people who did the calculations, but we can talk about their motivations, and begin to reconstruct a history of a Native American people that is as complete and detailed as any that we have from the Ancient Old World. And I think it's incredibly important for all of us, for humanity in general, to become aware of that history, and to absorb it, so that when we teach our children world history, Pakal, and Bird Jaguar, and Hasaw Kan K'awil, and Uaxaklahun Ubah K'awil are a part of world history, and that we incorporate this into the heritage of humanity. That's it.

MC: Bravo.

DL: Thank you.