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# Faded Maya Painted Inscriptions at Bonampak, Chiapas, Mexico

by Karl Herbert Mayer

## The Maya site of Bonampak

The ancient archaeological settlement of Bonampak is situated in the Selva Lacandona, in the Mexican state of Chiapas, within the Reserva de las Montes Azules, close to the Lacanha River, a tributary of the large Usumacinta River system.



Fig. 1. The Acropolis of Bonampak. Photo by Karl H. Mayer, 2012.



Fig. 2. Structure I, Bonampak, North Elevation. Photo by Karl H. Mayer, 2011.

In 2011, I obtained the geographic coordinates with a hand-held GPS

navigator that provided the following results: Longitude 16°42.20' and Latitude 91°03.92'. This places the site 24 km, as the parrot flies, south of the more extensive and culturally and politically dominating city of Yaxchilan (16°53.90', 90°57.88'). Bonampak is, in terms of spacial and architectural importance, a compact, but minor city, dating mainly to the Late Classic period.

The site is long to have been known to the Lacandon Maya inhabitants of this region, however, it was first “discovered” by non-Maya eyes in 1946, when the North Americans Herman Charles Frey and John Bourne first encountered the ruins, having been led there by the Lacandon.

Later they showed Giles Greville Healey a large masonry building on the first terrace, now known as Structure I, in which three vaulted rooms were found to have been brilliantly painted. These famous polychrome and large-sized murals, depicting a series of human figures associated with numerous glyphic texts, made this Maya site world-wide reknown and the subject of innumerable articles and books that focus primarily on the stupendous, impressing and spectacular murals (cf. Life 1949; Villagra 1949; Ruppert et al 1955; Miller 1986; Espinosa et al. 1988; Fuente and Staines 1998a, 1998b; and Miller and Brittenham 2013).

## The Painted Text on the Exterior of Structure I

Structure I, known also as the Temple of the Murals and in Spanish as “Templo de las Pinturas” and “Edificio de las Pinturas”, was erected on a platform, and measures 16.55 meters in length, 4.12 meters in depth, and seven

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**Jim Reed,**  
Editor

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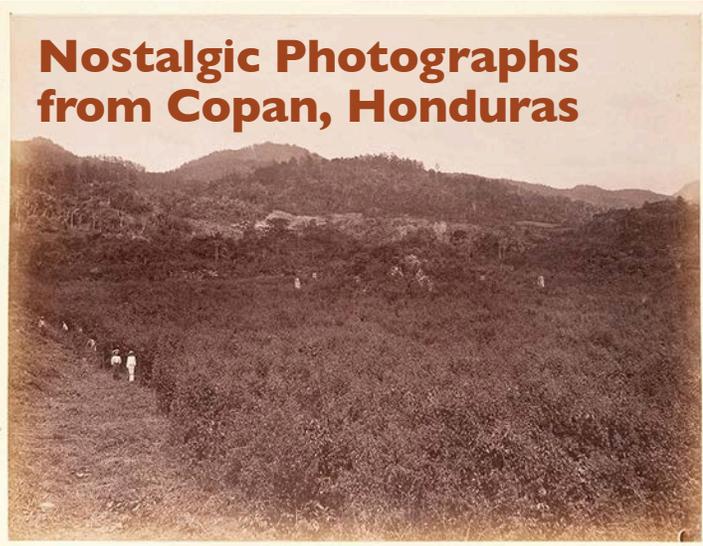
**Jim Reed**  
Newsletter Editor  
mayaman@bellsouth.net

*A nice photograph by Alfred P. Maudslay that shows a stairway inside the ruins of Structure 20, before it fell into the Copan River.*

Source: Peabody Museum Collections  
Online: <http://pmem.unix.fas.harvard.edu:8080/peabody/>

Wonderful photograph of the Copan main plaza area in 1892-1893, view looking North. The un-excavated mound of Structure 4 is in the center, Stela A is visible to the left of it and Stela H to the right of it. The people on the left are in the process of clearing the vegetation. Photo taken by Edmund Lincoln during Harvard University's Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology's second archaeological expedition to Copan and Guatemala in 1892-1893. Number: 2002.M.15

Source: GRI Digital Collections:  
<http://search.getty.edu/gateway/landing>

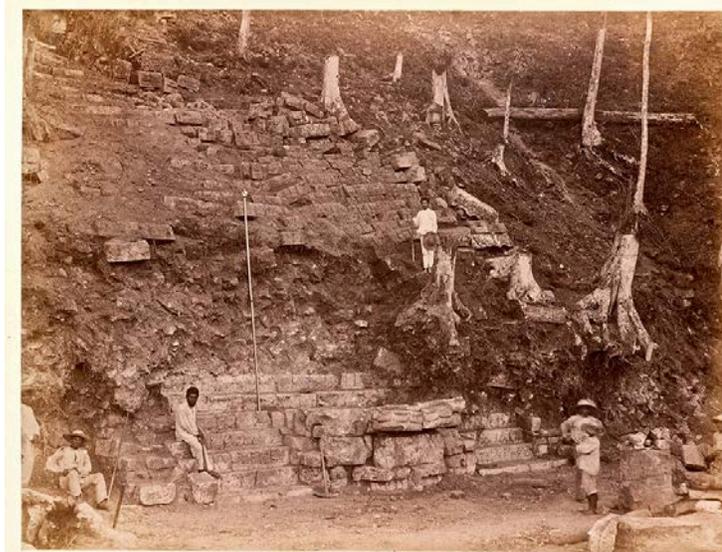


**Copan – Yesterday and Today**

**Editor's note:** While searching for color photos of Stelae 10 and 12 to include in Michael Grofe's article about the Copan Baseline in last's month's IMS Explorer issue, I encountered a wonderful Facebook page with hundreds of photos posted. Titled "Copan – Yesterday and Today", the site seems to be maintained periodically by Martin Bacardi, with a lot of nice posts and comments from Peter Thornquist, David Stuart, and many other Maya enthusiasts. The page not only reveals hundreds of modern-day images from all over the site, to photos taken inside the Copan Sculpture Museum, but also very interesting collections of images made in the 1800s by Alfred P. Maudslay, Osbert Salvin, Edmund Lincoln, and others. The nostalgic images are from collections in the British Museum, the Peabody Museum, and the Victoria and Albert Museum (in London). Links are provided so that you may access the original photos and the "Copan – Yesterday and Today" Facebook site as well. Enjoy!



Enjoy!



The Hieroglyphic Stairway during excavation in 1893. Photograph taken by Edmund Lincoln during Harvard University's Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology's second archaeological expedition to Copan and Guatemala in 1892-1893. Number: 2002.M.15

Source: GRI Digital Collections: <http://search.getty.edu/gateway/landing>



A photo of the Principal Group of ruins at Copan in 1891, view looking south. The great plaza is in front and the acropolis in the background. Most of the vegetation has been cleared and only Structure 11 is covered with trees. If you look closely you can see the various stelae, the mound of structure 4 and also the two mounds flanking the ball court. Photo by Marshall Saville 1891-92.

Source: Peabody Museum Collections Online: <http://pmem.unix.fas.harvard.edu:8080/peabody/start?t%3Astate%3Aflow=1651c0a0-e160-4da9-9be4-46b9d96ef812>

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Fig. 3. The hieroglyphic text on the exterior of Structure I. (Painting by Agustín Villagra, 1947. Courtesy of Leticia Staines Cicero, IIE, UNAM.)



Fig. 4: Detail of the façade text on Structure I (2012).



Fig. 5: Remaining text on Structure 5, left side (2011).

## Faded Maya Painted Inscriptions at Bonampak, Chiapas, Mexico

by Karl Herbert Mayer *continued from page 1*

meters in height. It is the largest standing masonry building of the eight standing vaulted and roofed structures of the Acropolis' architectural complex (Figs. 1, 2, page 1).

The vast literature relating to Bonampak focuses overwhelmingly on the painted interior walls, but there are also the lesser-known, but seemingly insignificant paintings on the exterior, that have survived in a bad condition and comprise of just a few little fragments. These examples decorate Structure I and Structure 5 and were executed by the skillful hands of ancient Maya artists and scribes. Obviously both paintings date to the end of the eighth century A.D.

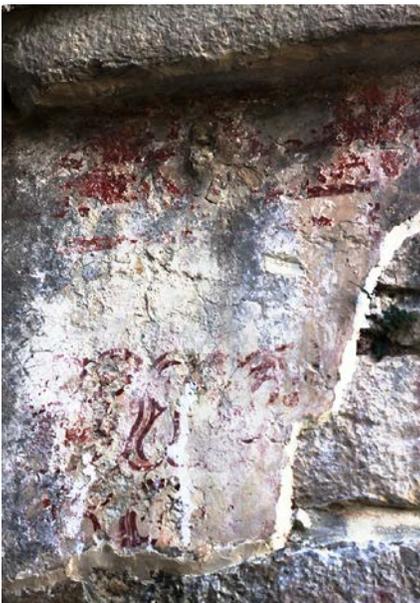


Fig. 6: Remaining text on Structure 5, right side (2011). All photos by Karl Herbert Mayer.

At the time of the modern rediscovery, the Mexican artist Agustín Villagra Caletí (1949) copied and documented the interior walls of Structure I, which were covered with the important iconographic and epigraphic images. In 1947, he made a remarkable reconstruction painting of the north façade of Structure I that was later discovered by Leticia Staines Cicero, and finally published in color in 1998 (Fuente and Staines 1998b:308, Pl. 131), and again fifteen years later (Miller and Brittenham 2013:29, Fig. 44).

The original copy by Villagra (Fig. 3) shows the location of the little remains of a painted glyphic band protected underneath a three-member medial molding, very much faded, chipped and destroyed. In 1995, Leticia Staines photographed in color a detail of the heavily damaged inscription (Fuente and Staines 1998a: 59, Pl. 10). Later in 1996, Justin Kerr took a color photograph that was published many years later (Miller and Brittenham 2013: 29, Fig. 43).

During my visits to Bonampak, I took several documentary photographs of the remaining contours of the glyphs (Fig. 4). There are faint traces that still survive since they were first observed and noted by Villagra Caletí more than seventy years ago. Mary Ellen Miller, leading the Bonampak Documentation Project of Yale University, dubbed the north façade glyphs as a "rim" text, and provided measurements for each of the glyph blocks as 20.5 cm wide and 14-15 cm in height. She describes the color as dark-red on the white stucco coating and estimates that the entire band encompassed originally approximately

81 glyphs (Fuente and Staines 1998b:241-242; Miller and Brittenham 2013: 23). Due to the ravages of time and the humid tropical forest, not a single complete glyph block has survived that is legible.

### The Painted Text on the Exterior of Structure 5

Structure 5 is a vaulted single room building. Located on the east side of the structure are surviving the remnants of a glyphic text that was investigated by Alfonso Arellano Hernández. This inscription is on a white stucco layer painted in red and orange. Arellano designated the inscription as Clause I (Fuente and Staines 1989a:46-47, Figs. 83, 84; 1989b:114, Pl. 4) and reported that the inscription is 35 cm high and 142 cm wide. It is located underneath a three member molding.

Clause I is composed of a dozen glyph blocks, arranged in six columns of two lines each (A1–F2). It is enframed by two horizontally placed dark-red bands. Above the paintings (Figs. 5, 6) one can observe the remains of a red painted stucco human head in high relief. Of the damaged text only three glyphs could be partially interpreted by Arellano (Fuente and Staines 1989a:46-47).

On Structure 5, on the west side of the north façade, Arellano also mentions two painted glyphic fragments; no illustration of this text seems to have been published.

### References

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*continued on page 7*



# Exploring the World of the Ancient Maya with Artist Steve Radzi

by Teena Clipston

A small percentage of people are driven to discover the ancient history of the Maya with such passion that it envelopes their lives. Artist and explorer, Steve Radzi, is one of those people. I recently attended an exhibit by Radzi, in Puerto Morelos, where I have come to know his incredibly extraordinary talent as an illustrator, the importance of his work, and the wealth of knowledge he has mastered on Maya history.

Radzi was born in Devon, England and studied art and illustration at Croydon College of Art, in Surrey, England. His passion for adventure would take him abroad to places such as Madras, Southern India, Southeast Asia, Australia, and, in 1973, to Los Angeles. There he worked as an illustrator for Hanna-Barbera Productions.

Radzi explains, "The English weather was the deciding factor in my move to Los Angeles. I enjoyed a bright, though somewhat brief career in the animation business, which included a commission to design the movie poster for "Being There" featuring Peter Sellers. It was at that time that I planned on more adventure and soon found myself on the road to Machu Picchu."

It was during this trip that archaeological travel bewitched him. He travelled through Central and South America, a journey that led to his incredible Maya-inspired artwork.

"The first stops on my journey in 1975 were the ruins of Monte Alban and Mitla in Mexico. From there I moved on to Guatemala, where I met up with a German friend I knew from India. We embarked on a somewhat uncharted passage during troubled times along the Pasion River in the Peten. Our destination was Tikal. This was my first taste of Maya Culture and [my] passion for illustrating these magnificent structures in the jungle.

After 18 months of traveling, I returned to Los Angeles and then decided to move to Miami. Miami was so close to Mexico, Belize and Guatemala, and it was an obvious choice for easy travel to the Maya land I was intrigued by."

"Maya culture has fascinated me since my first travels in the 1970s. At first, after reading books and, above all, looking at the majestic buildings and temples, I wondered about what became of these people: who were the architects, astronomers, mathematicians and rulers of this amazing culture? I can only say that, although I've learned quite a bit about the culture, I still have many unanswered questions."

It would be easy to compare Radzi's spirit to that of famed artist and explorer, Frederick Catherwood (1799 – 1854). In 1836, Catherwood, along with American writer, John Lloyd Stephens, set out to



Remains of a Late Post-Classic Maya Period Outpost on the Caribbean Coast of Mexico. Known as "Xa'ac". This structure has survived the ravages of time. Not open to the general public. Colored Pencil and Watercolor.

explore and document the lost cities of the Maya, a time when photography was in its infancy, and illustrators were still important in Maya studies.

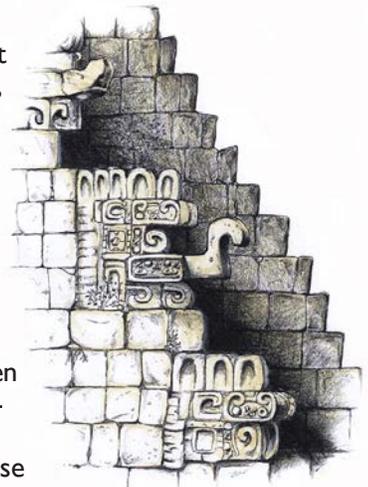
There are two exceptional differences between Radzi and Catherwood: the time in which both of these explorers set out, and the means in which their artistic renderings were/are created. Both of these men journeyed into dense jungles to find forgotten temples overgrown and thick with vegetation, and stood in the heat of the sun sketching their discoveries and capturing the unique historic details forever.

However, Radzi creates his illustrations with a skilled eye; Catherwood used a contraption called "a camera lucida" – an optical device that superimposes the object being viewed upon the artist's drawing surface. Using this device, the artist can then trace the object with perfect detail.

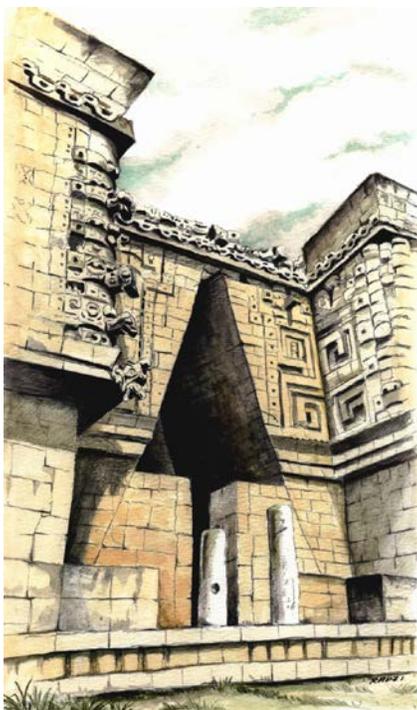
"Sketching is an art form I really enjoy, no matter what the subject. However, something very unique happens out in the field when I am in the presence of a structure or temple, as opposed to drawing something from a photograph.

It is interesting to compare the different styles and periods of construction and to mentally re-create what they may well have looked like in their day, but I mostly enjoy drawing the structures in situ.

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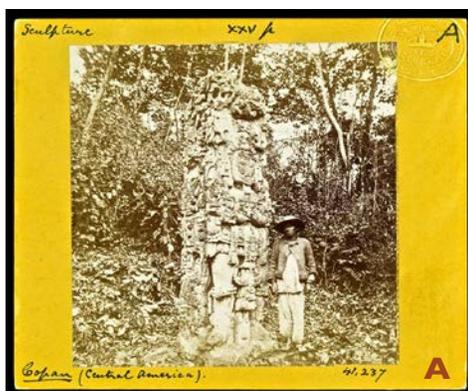
Steps and Mask at The Magicians Palace, Uxmal. Pencil and wash by Steve Radzi.



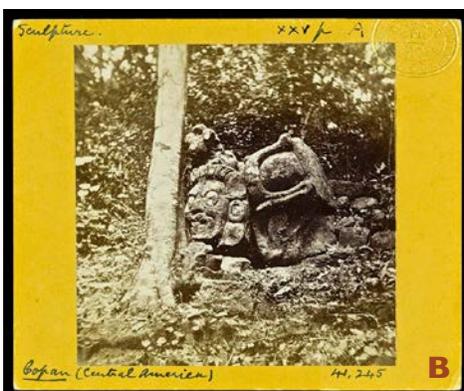
Arch at Governor's Palace, Uxmal. Watercolor by Steve Radzi.



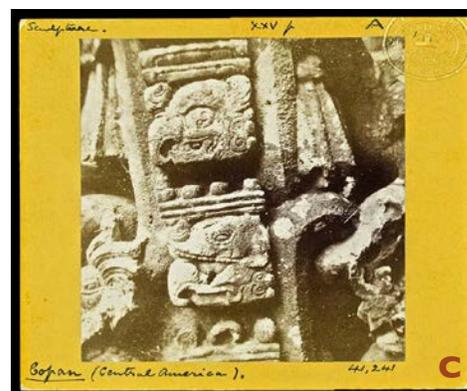
# Nostalgic Photographs from Copan, Honduras continued from page 2



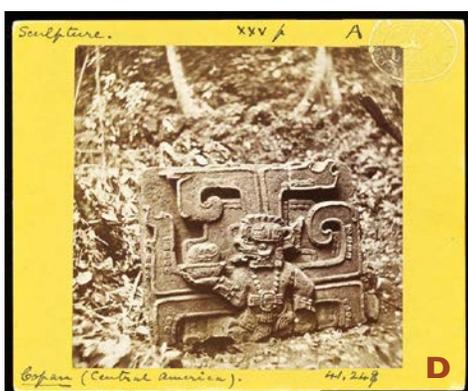
A) Stela D; the man standing next to the stela is probably a local guide who assisted Osbert Salvin (1861).



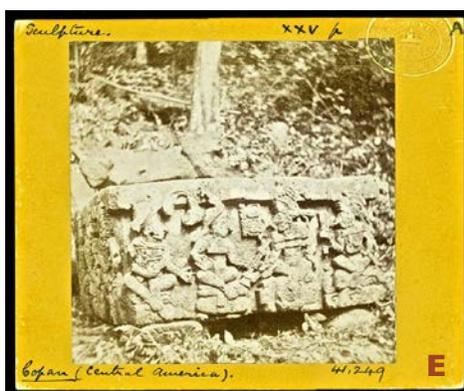
B) The solar head within the jaws of a serpent sculpture located on the western stairway of the East Court (1861).



C) Stela N, detail of hieroglyphs (1861).

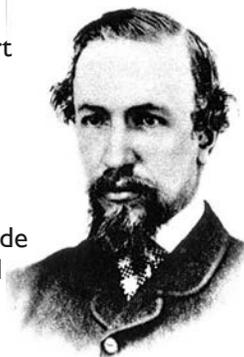


D) One of the false ballcourt markers from the West Court (1861).



E) Altar Q, west side (1861).

These images, part of a collection of stereoscopic photographs (Sterographs) by English naturalist Osbert Salvin, made during his Central American travels in the year 1861, are a most fascinating glimpse of Copan twenty-two years after Stephens/Catherwood's departure and twenty years before Alfred Maudslays' arrival.



Sterographs, as the name implies, are actually a set, two images of the same subject taken by the camera at the same time. The editor has edited those here to conserve space. Twentyfour sets are posted on the "Copan – Yesterday and Today" Facebook site at: <https://www.facebook.com/Copan-Yesterday-and-Today-483294771801045/> and also available from the original source by searching on the Victoria and Albert Museum website at: <http://collections.vam.ac.uk>



Stela I, broken and laying on the ground with its altar. Photograph by Alfred P. Maudslay, 1890–1891. ©The Trustees of the British Museum. British Museum number: Am,Maud,B8.32 [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?objectId=3291279&partId=1&searchText=Alfred+Maudslay&images=true&page=3](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=3291279&partId=1&searchText=Alfred+Maudslay&images=true&page=3)



The ruins of Structure 20 in 1892-1893, by Alfred P. Maudslay. This is the northeastern corner of the east court. As mentioned previously, shortly after this photograph was taken Structure 20 fell into the Copan River that had been eating away at the eastern side of the acropolis for some time. ©President and Fellows of Harvard College. Peabody Number: 2001.20.1.115 <http://pmem.unix.fas.harvard.edu:8080/peabody/> continued on page 6

# Nostalgic Photographs from Copan, Honduras

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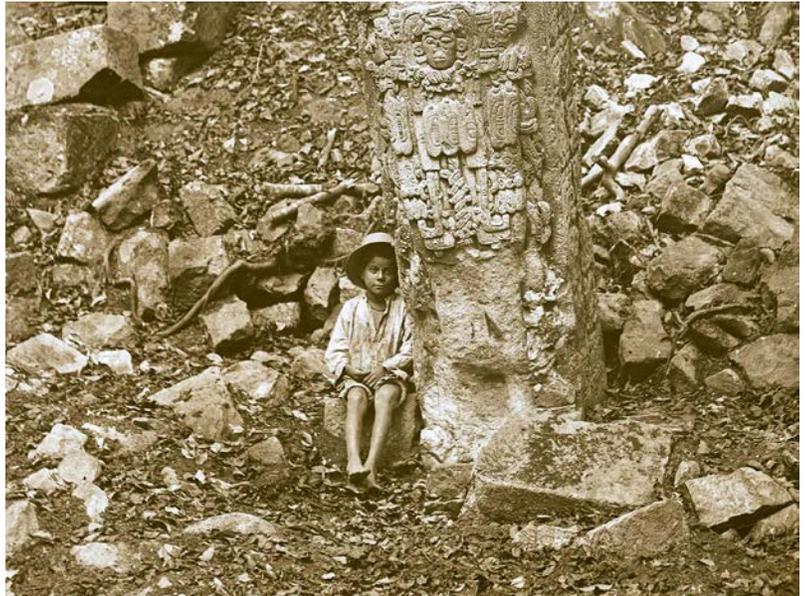
## The Little Boy of Copan

Following some months travelling in different parts of the world including India and Japan, Alfred P. Maudslay arrived in Belize in January 1881 and thence travelled to Guatemala. He had with him the two volumes of John Stephen's book, *Incidents of Travel in Central America*, published in 1841 but still widely enjoyed today, that may have inspired him to turn to archaeology. For some months he had been working to perfect his Spanish, a skill that was essential for his journeys across Central America. His first stop was at the Maya ruins of Quirigua, where he took what were to become the first of a vast library of photographs.

The cameras then available were very large and cumbersome, chemicals had to be carried to develop the glass negatives and the only flash lighting available came from magnesium powder or ribbon so obtaining good photographs in the field was no easy task. But Alfred's superb results continue to provide reference documents for Maya scholars even today. It was not an easy task to photograph the ruins. They were covered with centuries of jungle growth and surrounded by near-impenetrable trees and creepers. This had to be cleared by hand using long jungle knives (machetes). Then layers of moss and other growths had to be scrubbed off very carefully to see any carved inscriptions below. From Quirigua he travelled by mule, with several more mules for all his equipment including his cameras and photographic chemicals, to Copan.

At Copan, he had his assistant Gorgonio López with him, and he secured local guides to show him around the site and workers to clear the trees and undergrowth.

Many of Maudslay's photographs included an intriguing young boy, a boy whose image has endured, but his name has been forgotten. We wonder what his name is, what happened to him, and if he has any descendants living today.



Little boy sitting beside Stela P, located in the west court.



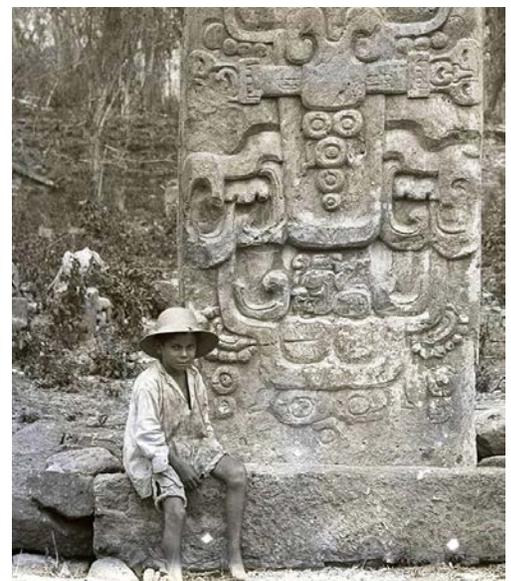
Here he is sitting on top of one of three "incense burners" (it is actually a tall head sculpture) located on the dance platform, just to the north of Structure 16, between the east court and west court.



Little boy sitting beside Stela F. He is joined by Maudslay's assistant Gorgonio López.

**Editor's note:** The paragraphs of text on this page are by Richard Maudslay CBE FREng, Chairman of the British Mexican Society, and great nephew of Alfred Maudslay. You can read the full story at: <http://www.mexicolore.co.uk/maya/home/the-life-of-alfred-maudslay>

The photos of the Little Boy of Copan are by Alfred P. Maudslay, and are part of the British Museum collection, and available at: [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?objectId=3357203&partId=1&searchText=copan&page=2](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=3357203&partId=1&searchText=copan&page=2) They are also posted on the "Copan - Yesterday and Today" Facebook page at: [https://www.facebook.com/pg/Copan-Yesterday-and-Today-483294771801045/posts/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/Copan-Yesterday-and-Today-483294771801045/posts/?ref=page_internal)



In this photo, the little boy is sitting beside Stela B.



Steve Radzi, working in the field, at home in the jungle!

After I am finished, I often take a photograph, so that when I want to complete a sketch and turn it into a colored illustration, I can catch any missing details important for the final composition. Sketching in the field is quite a task, depending on where the site may be and the weather conditions. On many occasions arduous long hikes are necessary to accomplish my objective. Wearing the right apparel is essential to ward off a variety of insects. I usually carry a sketchpad (8-1/2" x 10")

## Exploring the World of the Ancient Maya with Artist Steve Radzi

by Teena Clipston *continued from page 4*

that can fit snugly in a rainproof bag and several pencils. Many years ago I would carry some colored pencils and after my visit to the site, I would color them in and often use a fine tipped pen to outline the subject. I cannot imagine using any other medium that may be cumbersome to carry; however since I now have an iPad Pro and I have attempted to sketch on it with some success."

Steve adds, "I would like to thank all the wonderful people who have shared their experiences in the Maya world, for enhancing my personal journey. I am eternally grateful for their support."

### About the Author: Teena Clipston

Teena Clipston graduated with a diploma in Journalism and Short Story writing in 1996. She has since published 100s of articles and two short stories. She is currently writing her first fictional novel, *Gypsy Saint James and the Treasure of IxChel*. Visit her website and read the full article at: <https://teenaclipston.com/artist-steve-radzi/>

Also, be sure to visit Steve's Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/pg/Mayavision-691716284214223/posts/> and his website at: [www.mayavision.com](http://www.mayavision.com)

## Faded Maya Painted Inscriptions at Bonampak, Chiapas, Mexico

by Karl Herbert Mayer *continued from page 3*

Fuente, Beatriz de la, and Leticia Staines Cicero (Editors)

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## The Maya Train: From Cancun to Palenque

Mexican officials announced a new railroad project that will begin construction in December 2018, and will start in Cancun and cross the Yucatan Peninsula, passing through four states to arrive in Palenque. The total route is 907 kilometers or 564 miles, and it is expected to take about 9 hours to travel the entire length.

From Cancun to Tulum, the line will be two-way, with two sets of tracks. Trains will leave early in the morning specifically to take workers who live in Cancun to their work places along the Riviera Maya. Separate trains will be designed for tourists and others who want to travel to the interior of the peninsula. Beyond the coast, the route will be a single track.

The train will not be electric, but a biodiesel hybrid so as not to affect the fauna. Some of the rail cars will have cabins, restaurants, bars, and a few will have archaeological and ecological information displayed.

Cruise ships and the Cancun airport bring in an estimated 3 million visitors to Chichen Itza, and 4 million visitors to Tulum. The idea is to provide an efficient, fun, and comfortable means for travelers to access other important Maya sites across the peninsula.

In Quintana Roo, the train will have stops at



Officially released map of the proposed route of the Maya Train.

Tulum, the Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve, Bacalar, Chetumal, Carillo Puerto, Xpujil and Chicanna. Heading through Campeche, the train will stop by Calakmul and Balamkul, then towards Tenosique and Balancan in Tabasco, then to Palenque in Chiapas. Another train makes its way to Escarcega and Merida.

Officials plan to develop a tourist infrastructure of new attractions and facilities that will entice visitors to explore other important areas of Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche and southern Quintana Roo.

Source: The original article by Marcela Nazar was posted to the editor's Facebook page by Elaine Schele.

## Upcoming Events and Announcements:

September 19 • 6 pm: *IMS Presentation Ancient Cities of Central Mexico* – with **Rick Slazyk** and **Marta Barber**. While the Maya flourished in Southern Mexico and the Yucatan Peninsula, other groups were building bustling cities, developing writing and creating artwork rivaling their neighbors to the south. Unlike the Maya, these were capital cities that ruled from a central axis and became powerful centers of trade, knowledge, and religious rituals: Monte Alban, El Tajin, and Teotihuacan. President of IMS Rick Slazyk will present his collection of photographs from these sites and discuss the different architectural styles and the layouts of the cities. IMS Travel Director Marta Barber will talk about the people who lived in them and the artwork they created.

October 17 • 6 pm: *IMS Presentation The Underwater Maya Project* – with **Heather McKillop**, Thomas & Lillian Landrum Alumni Professor, Dept. of Geography and Anthropology

at Louisiana State University. Heather will talk about the Underwater Maya Project as well as her new book: *Maya Salt Works*. Check out the Project's website at: <http://underwatermaya.com> or access their Facebook page by searching for: DIVA Lab.

August 7 • 7 pm: *Missouri Museum Lecture From Weeping Hills to Lost Caves: Greater Cahokia's Vibrant Landscapes* – Theme of a Mound City Archaeological Society Lecture with **Susan Holt**. At the Missouri History Museum, St. Louis, MO. Get more info at: <http://mohistory.org/events?type=Lectures,%20Book%20Signings,%20and%20Panels&series=archaeology%20programs>

Sept. 15: *Annual PCSWDC Symposium The Peopling of the Americas: Recent Research and Perspectives* – **David Meltzer** of SMU will moderate a day-long program in which leading archaeologists and geneticists will address the still-controversial topic of when and

how people first arrived in the new world, their migration routes, and the process by which they spread throughout the North and South

American continents. Program details and registration info are now available on the Pre-Columbian Society/DC website: [www.pcswdc.org](http://www.pcswdc.org)

End of September: *M@TP Symposium Maya at the Playa* – Mat Saunders is currently digging with Stan Guenter and the Davidson Day School adventurers in Belize. He will update the Maya at the Playa website, and reveal the 2018 symposium program and speakers soon after they return. We'll make sure you receive the IMS Members Only discount. Stay tuned to [www.mayaatthep Playa.com](http://www.mayaatthep Playa.com) for updates.

Editor's Tip: *Online all the time Ancient Americas Events* – Get in the know with Mike Ruggeri's "better-than-ever!" comprehensive list of upcoming Ancient Americas Lectures, Conferences and Exhibits: Go to: <https://mikeruggerisevents.tumblr.com>



# IMS EXPLORER

Join the **Explor-ation!** Scholar or not, we welcome submissions from IMS members and other Maya enthusiasts. Share what interests you with others. All articles and news items for the **IMS Explorer** should be forwarded to the newsletter editor at: [mayaman@bellsouth.net](mailto:mayaman@bellsouth.net)