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The Happy Accident – Linda Schele Meets Palenque, Moi, and Merle by Elaine Schele

Thank you to Jim Reed and the Institute of Maya studies for the opportunity to relate some of the work I have been doing on the biography of Linda Schele. I should first explain my title “The Happy Accident”. It refers to the way Linda lived her life – a bit of luck mixed with any unexpected turn of events. She learned this concept from a professor of painting at the University of Cincinnati where she earned a BFA, BS, and MFA. Professor Phil Foster gave her two important working methodologies: first, how to recognize and reproduce pattern, a skill that is essential to painting. She used the analogy of a large vacuum cleaner sucking in data trying to see patterns, but not deciding upon any outcome, letting the data pattern in her mind and then follow the pattern to a destination

The second method she called “the

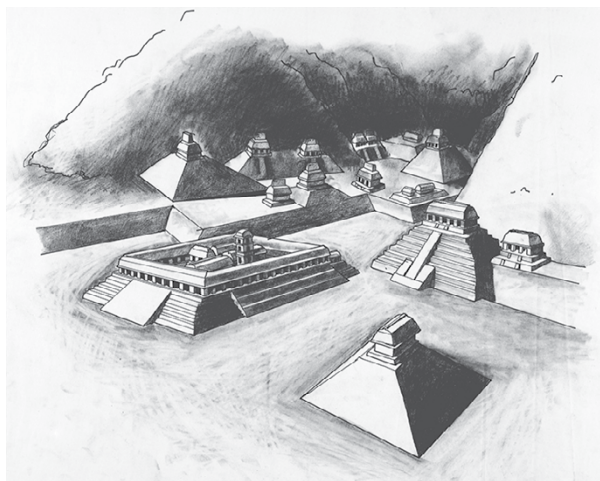
Linda standing in front of one of her paintings (detail); see the full image on page 7.



happy accident” that comes from the Japanese culture where first the artist perfects his/her craft very well, then the artist begins the painting by “breaking the white”. Next, no matter the subject, the artist gets the color on the canvas and waits for the painting to do something unusual. Then, the artist follows it through no matter where it wants to go.

As she told Mike Coe, “you want to keep yourself in an alpha state so that when a happy accident comes along, you are aware that it happened, and you are aware that you can follow the happy accident wherever it will lead you.” These two methodologies explain some of Linda’s working habits and how she stumbled upon Palenque, followed the path into the ruins and let her heart and mind lead the way. It served her very well.

In 1968, Linda began her first teaching job at the University of South Alabama. Two years later, in the summer of 1970, she and



One of Linda’s early drawings showing an aerial view of “downtown” Palenque.

IMS Streaming: November 17 8 pm ET



Photo credit: Overbeek

The Happy Accident – Linda Schele Meets Palenque, Moi, and Merle with Elaine Schele



**Jim Reed,
Editor**

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Institute of Maya Studies Ballot: Nominees to the 2022 Board of Directors



2022 will be a momentous year in the life of the IMS... we'll be celebrating 50 years of working together to offer the public and Maya enthusiasts the best of what's out there on one important Maya studies website, in one monthly publication, and across the zoom platform. Our current IMS board members are up for re-election, plus there are empty slots, so you can vote for all. At the same time, you can recommend someone who might be interested in becoming an IMS board member. *The IMS is a place where your vote counts!*

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You can print out this page and mail this ballot to the address listed below:

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Running for Re-election to the IMS Board of Directors:

- [] **Rick Slazyk:** Rick is a practicing architect, LEED certified. He has served as vice president of the IMS and is our current President.
- [] **Janet Miess:** Janet received her Bachelor's Degree in Archaeology in 2004 and her Master's in Library Science in 2006. She has been a member of Institute of Maya Studies since 2008 and joined the IMS Board in 2010. She is currently serving as IMS secretary and IMS Treasurer.
- [] **Keith Merwin:** Keith is the President of International Voice Technologies Inc. He is the current webmaster of the IMS.
- [] **Jim Reed:** Jim is our *IMS Explorer* newsletter editor and he is a past president of IMS (2000).

Running for Election to the IMS Board of Directors: Write the name of someone you would like to recommend to be a board member (including yourself) and include their email address if possible:

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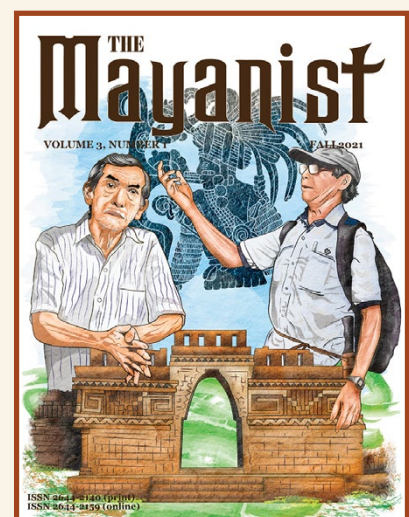
Jim Reed
Newsletter Editor/
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The Mayanist Issue 3(1) from American Foreign Academic Research

We are excited to announce that Issue 3(1) of *The Mayanist* was just published online! This issue is dedicated to essential and recent developments in the field of community-based participatory research in the Maya world and beyond. Download it (or any of its papers) for free here: <https://www.goafar.org/themayanist>

This issue was edited by Maxime Lamoureux St-Hilaire, Mat Saunders, and Claire Novotny – our guest editor who did a phenomenal job. All the original artwork was masterfully done by ajtz'ib Walter Paz Joj. The issue was laid out by Joel Skidmore and copy-edited by Jack Barry.

You can now purchase hard copies of *The Mayanist* in the AFAR store front: <https://www.goafar.org/new-products>



Lost and Found: An Architectural Survey in the Maya Puuc Area, Part II

by Stephan Merk

In this second part about my survey in the Dzekilna area, I will present the Rank 4 and Rank 5 archaeological sites, namely Maler-Dsancab, Tzutzuy, and Kalakmul Pequeña.

Rank 4 sites, according to the ranking systems for Puuc settlements established by George F. Andrews and Nicholas P. Dunning, probably had characteristics and purposes between those of Rank 1 to Rank 3 cities – on the one side – and the Rank 5 to Rank 6 villages on the other (Andrews 1995; Dunning 1992).

Interestingly, many of them are geographically situated midway between higher-ranked cities, near the hypothetical boundaries of the major territories, though their political relationships are not clearly understood. This is also true for the only Rank 4 site found in the Dzekilna grid: Maler-Dsancab, a medium-sized settlement that lies in a central position between Dzekilna in the west, and the large Rank 2 city of Sayil in the east.

Maler-Dsancab

Together with Karl Herbert Mayer, I was able to prove that this settlement is identical to the site visited in 1887 by the German-Austrian explorer and photographer Teobert Maler, which he documented under the name of Dsancab (Maler 1997: 56). Given that there is another, smaller site with the same name relatively close-by (Dunning 1992: 257), I have re-named this Rank 4 site as Maler-Dsancab (Merk 2011).

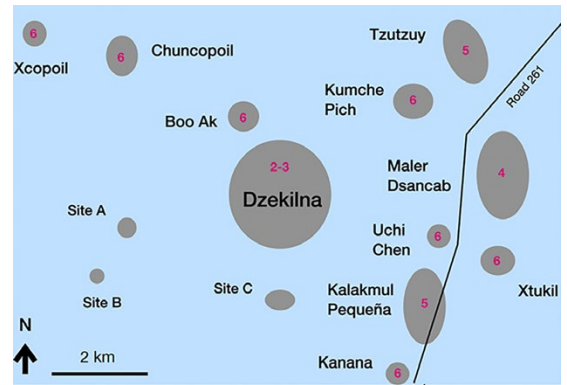
The ancient site of Maler-Dsancab covers mostly level terrain of up to

1.5 kilometers and dotted by small hills in the central easternmost part of the Dzekilna area. Its major group, the only one with large and massive architecture, is situated to the south. From there, the site continues for more than one kilometer to the north with only small buildings arranged around four open areas which in ancient times, as well as today, were used as agricultural areas (Fig. 1).

It seems the buildings in the Main Group were all erected on top of a large, 2- to 3-meter high man-made platform. The platform primarily carries two neighboring pyramids (one of them connects to a not-fully-closed quadrangle of fallen structures), one nine-room building, and the site's largest structure that was probably a three-story building on top of a small hill.

The latter is the only edifice that Maler described, and is named "The Palace" by locals who tend the milpa fields in that area (Fig. 2). Like the large structure in the South Group at Dzekilna, one side of the Palace protrudes beyond the platform on which the building stands extending down to ground level. I propose that on the lower part of the slope, there was an additional row of rooms on both sides of a staircase, today totally collapsed.

Therefore, the building consists of two floors when approached from the platform level, but of three floors when seen from ground level. This much fallen Palace could have had up to 17 rooms arranged around all sides of the building. It was once decorated with a number of so-called Chac masks. Elements of these masks, including their well-known long and curved snouts or noses, were



Map showing the numerous archaeological sites located within the area of the Dzekilna grid. This article focuses on Maler-Dsancab, Tzutzuy, and Kalakmul Pequeña. References appearing in Part II are published in Part I in the October IMS Explorer. All photos and map by Stephan Merk.



Fig. 1: A typical Classic Puuc vault in one of the northern buildings in Maler-Dsancab.

seen in the structure's rubble.

One building, close to one of the pyramids, needs special mention because of its narrow rooms and roughly-worked vaults, indicating an early construction date (Merk 2011), and was probably built in the Proto Puuc style (around 550-650 AD). All the other standing architecture in Maler-Dsancab can most likely be style-dated to Early Puuc (650-770 AD) and Late Puuc (770-950 AD).

In total, we documented 21 buildings, including the two pyramids, 32 additional platforms, and one foundation brace.

Rank 5 sites

Rank 5 settlements are clearly of less extension and most likely of less political importance than the higher ranked sites, with many of them probably dependent on the latter. On the other hand, they cover larger areas and consist of more groups of structures than the Rank 6 sites (Andrews 1995: 227).

continued on page 5



Fig. 2: One of the front rooms visible within the three-story building found at Maler-Dsancab.



One of Linda's "Jungle" paintings. As she told Mike Coe, "you want to keep yourself in an alpha state."

The Happy Accident – Linda Schele Meets Palenque, Moi, and Merle

by Elaine Schele *continued from page 1*

her husband David attended the 60th wedding anniversary of Linda's grandparents in Laclede, Missouri, and as they were returning to their car, Linda's mother, Ruby, stopped them to ask if they would be making their annual Christmas trip to her Nashville home. David blurted out that they would not since they were making a trip to Mexico at Christmas. Linda liked the idea. Arriving home, she immediately wrote and received a university project grant to study Maya architecture, creating a photographic archive for the university along the way. At this point in time, neither of the Scheles spoke much Spanish.

At Christmas break, they converted their silver van into a camper/kitchen, loaded it with supplies, piled in several of Linda's art students, and off they drove to Mexico. Linda kept a large black notebook in their glove compartment where she and the students made notes on things of interest about the trip. As they drove down the Gulf Coast, they stopped at El Tajin, the very first ancient Mesoamerican site that they had ever seen. They reached a road that forked – one going inland and the other continuing down the coast. They took the inland route and ended up at a hotel in Villahermosa where they met a Guatemalan expatriate lodger. The

man insisted that they had to stop at Palenque and meet a super great guy named Moises Morales, who was also a tour guide. They took his advice and headed further inland toward Palenque. After arriving in town, they went directly to the archaeological site.

They set up camp in the parking lot at the site and soon met Mario Leon, the supervisor and guardian of the ruins. After breakfast, they hired a twelve-year-old guide at the entrance, and they walked into the ruins. Coming down one of the paths, they saw a tour guide leading a large group of French tourists. Linda, in her usual gregarious manner, started a conversation with him. She asked him if he knew a tour guide named Moises Morales and he quickly confessed that it was he. He invited them to his house in the barrio *La Cañada* to eat dinner with his family. Moi knew more about the site than anyone at that time. Later Linda would call Moi a "guru". She told Coe that Moi had the ability "to make people love those ruins, and to see the ruins and to feel special when they come to Palenque, and he worked his magic on me."

The *La Cañada* barrio consisted of a small group of rooms for rent and a restaurant called by that same name, all owned by the extended Morales family. Among those staying at *La Cañada* was a couple named Merle and Bob



Pictured is the presentation of the first "Linda Schele Award" to Justin Kerr, by David Stuart (left) and David Schele (right). Photo by Elaine Schele.

Robertson who were teachers at the Robert Louis Stevenson School in California. According to Alfonso Morales, Merle first came to Palenque in the late 1960s with Bob Rands who was an archaeologist at the site. Merle was an artist, and she was drawing ceramics for Rands. She and her husband would eventually build a house at *La Cañada* and call it "*Na Chan-Bahlum*". Witnessing the erosion of the sculptures at the site, she began a large project to preserve and document them in photography and through ink rubbings before they disappeared entirely. Moi introduced Linda and David to Merle and they hit it off right away. Even though the Scheles were only supposed to be in Palenque a few hours, those hours turned into days as they became spell-bound by the ancient city. They continued camping there for four or five days. Each night they would visit *La Cañada* and talk with the Morales family.

According to Linda however, "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." During this time and all subsequent visits to Mexico, she continued using her sketchbook to make notes, sketch the buildings, and contemplate the Palenque jungle.

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Lost and Found: An Architectural Survey in the Maya Puuc Area, Part II by Stephan Merk *continued from page 3*

Two settlements in this category were located within the Dzekilna area; Tzutzuy in the northeastern part, and Kalakmul Pequeña in the southeastern part of the grid.

Tzutzuy

At the site of Tzutzuy (also known locally as Sabana Tzutzuy) we found four groups of buildings; one in the savanna and three on small hills towards the south. The Sabana Group (Group 1) consists of three small buildings on an outcrop in the middle of a flat area which was used for agriculture in ancient times. It would seem at least two of these fallen buildings were erected in the Late Puuc style and probably never had masonry roofs (Graf and Merk 2010).

Much better preserved architecture can be seen at the hill groups. What I denote as the Main Group (Group 2) shows two buildings with partially standing architecture. Building 1 has seven rooms with an interesting layout. It consists of a row of four chambers along an east to west axis that had their entrances to the north towards the direction of the agricultural fields (see **Fig 3**).

From the westernmost room in that row one additional chamber protrudes to the north, and from the eastern-most room two more chambers run towards the south. The second building has two rooms and starts one meter north of the easternmost chamber of Building 1 in a northerly direction. This alignment creates two courtyards, one in the north and one in the south of the platform on top of the hill. Of the nine rooms in total it is likely eight can be assigned to the Early Puuc style, while the ninth chamber was probably built in what Andrews named Intermediate style (Andrews 1995).

On top of an even higher and very elongated hill south of the Main Group we detected two more structures among several low and very simply executed platforms. The first one (Group 3) was probably a low, small pyramid, while the second one (Group 4) is a well-preserved Early Puuc one-room building about 300 meters southwest of Group 3.



Fig. 3: A partly-preserved room in Tzutzuy's Main Group.



Fig. 4: Two pyramids dominate the main courtyard in the northern part of Kalakmul Pequeña.

Kalakmul Pequeña

Kalakmul Pequeña, a site investigated by Nicholas Dunning in the 1980s, is the second Rank 5 settlement in the Dzekilna grid, and is situated on level terrain (Dunning 1989: 38, 73-74). Two groups of buildings, in the north and the south respectively, frame a central area of scattered platforms

continued on page 6

The Happy Accident – Linda Schele Meets Palenque, Moi, and Merle by Elaine Schele *continued from page 4*

They eventually left Palenque and traveled north to other archaeological sites to fulfill the requirements of the grant. But they returned to Palenque 36 hours later, camping once again at Palenque and staying another four or five days. They were again under Palenque's spell. The complex architecture, the flowing calligraphic quality of the glyphs, the stucco sculpture, the rain forest and its creatures, the cool and refreshing pools and cascades, along with the calcium rocks, drew them all in. Linda's yearning to solve some

of the mysteries was strong."

They also had the opportunity to enjoy more of the local attractions and amenities such as an airplane ride to Bonampak and creating friendship bonds with the extended Morales family. They stayed through New Year's Day and Linda remembered that after having New Year's dinner with Moi's family, she whispered into Moi's ear "I will be back."

Another very important person they met at Palenque was Alfonso, the second oldest son of Moi. He, along with Linda and John Bowles

would become Merle's handymen, helping with her projects. On a subsequent visit, Alfonso, Merle and Linda would spend 19 or so days in the tomb while Merle was photographing all of it. This was Linda's second experience with the tomb. The first time she went down the steps was with Moi.

According to people who knew her, Linda had a compulsive-obsessive personality. When she latched onto something that fascinated her, she threw herself into it until she mastered it with deep passion and commitment. That included creating architectural drawings of the buildings in Palenque's central precinct.

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Lost and Found: An Architectural Survey in the Maya Puuc Area, Part II by Stephan Merk *continued from page 5*

and low mounds. By far the most important complex in the northern part is a courtyard with two pyramids situated on its north and east ends, as well as two small, fallen, formerly vaulted buildings to the south and the west (**Fig 4**, page 5). The latter had entrances divided by doorway columns, and in the courtyard's center is a typical conical Puuc altar. Interestingly, low walls connect the four structures. No chultun is associated with this group. Because of this and the two pyramids, a ceremonial usage can be assumed for this unit.

The second group lies 1.1 km south and probably had a mixed civic-ceremonial function. In its center are five heavily destroyed structures, none of them having more than one room, and formed around a courtyard. The west side of this courtyard is dominated by an approximate six meter high pyramid that once had a small room on top. On the east side are the scant

remains of another room on top of a pyramidal substructure, while the remaining three small buildings (two on the north side and one on the south side) stand on low platforms.

A short distance north of this complex is another pyramidal substructure. Dunning identified the minimal remains on its top as a foundation brace. Two other buildings in the northern section of this group show some standing architecture and consist of two and four rooms, respectively.

Finally, there is a partly preserved, L-shaped building with a total of nine chambers built on an outcrop roughly east of the courtyard (**Fig. 5**). This structure, together with two overgrown mounds which most likely represent former buildings, form a second courtyard in the South Group.

All the ancient structures



Fig. 5: One of the better preserved chambers in the nine room structure in Kalakmul Pequeña's South Group.

have suffered from extensive stone robbing, executed mainly to construct the Road 261 that runs through the South Group. Given the state of devastation it was, without excavation, almost impossible to style-date the structures in Kalakmul Pequeña, though traces of both Early and Late Classic Puuc architecture were detected in the rubble of the 15 documented structures at the site.

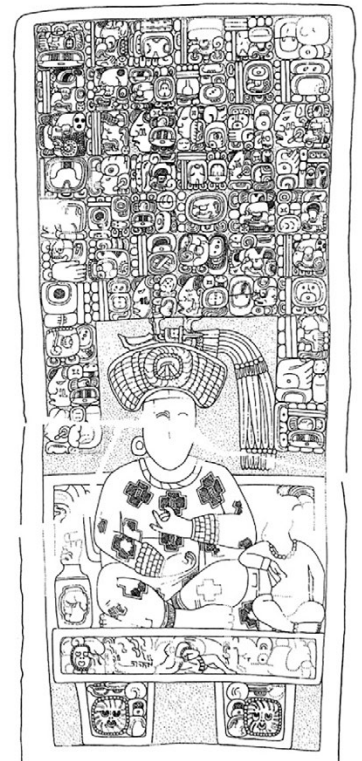
In the upcoming third and final part, I will describe the lowest-ranked settlements in the Dzekilna grid. 🏰

Unbundling the Past: Events in Ancient and Contemporary Maya History for November by Zach Lindsey

16 November 653 CE: On 9.11.1.2.0 9 Ajaw 3 K'ank'in G4, K'inich Kan Bahlam of Palenque entered a cave. He did so in the sight of G1 and G111, important patron gods of the city. While it may seem funny to commemorate a spelunking trip, cave enterings were, of course, incredibly important ritual events in Mesoamerican society – and still are, in some parts of Mexico and Central America. In the 1970s, Otomí curandero Alfonso García Téllez provided a detailed description of a cave-entering ceremony to ask for rain. It was a massive undertaking, with dozens of people playing roles and planning. Fasting, sexual abstinence, and sleep deprivation all led up to a raucous dance in the cave.

You can read a translation of his account [here](#).

17 November 686 CE: On 9.12.14.10.14 12 Ix 12 K'ank'in G7, ? Chaahk Itzam K'an Ahk died shortly before or during the wedding of his son. ? Chaahk Itzam K'an Ahk was a king of Piedras Negras who balanced military might with arts and scholasticism to make his city a fundamental part of the Maya world despite its small size. There's a subtext to this ruler noted by Flora Clancy: He seems to have cared deeply about his son – as a human, not just as a potential replacement monarch. I like this idea, which is why I'm wary of it. Seems every time I really like an idea, someone comes along and challenges it. (I'm looking at you, Great Goddess of Teotihuacan!) Still, his son went on to be one of the few Maya monarchs to memorialize a child on a stela – a girl, none-the-less. The image is Stela 3, and the girl is gazing up at her mom lovingly, a stark contrast to other images of children engaged in events like their first bloodletting rituals. So maybe ? Chaahk Itzam K'an Ahk did nurture his son, who in turn nurtured his own daughter. 🏰



Piedras Negras Stela 3

by John Montgomery

Lady K'atun seated with her young daughter leaning against her knee.

IMS Live Streaming 11.17.2021

Join in the Exploration!

Wednesday
November 17
at 8 pm ET

Access and bookmark this active hyperlink to join the event:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89793365644>

The Happy Accident – Linda Schele Meets Palenque, Moi, and Merle, with Elaine Schele



Linda standing in front of one of her paintings. When she first visited the temples of Palenque, she was an artist who taught studio art.

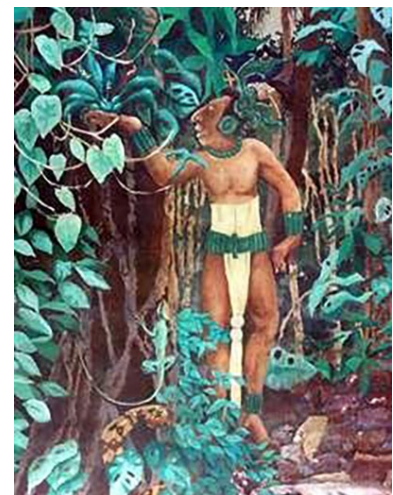
Linda Schele's cathartic visit to Palenque, Mexico in 1970 was transformative for her. She fell in love with the ancient ruins, the forest surrounding it, the people of Palenque and with the art and architecture of the site.

She spent the next two years obsessively studying its architecture and its jungle, drawing the buildings and creating oil paintings of its rich foliage.

I will share some of those paintings and drawings during the presentation. She was also teaching studio art at the University of South

Alabama during that time and began a habit of returning to Palenque on scheduled breaks from her teaching job, bringing two to three art students with her on each trip.

During her third year of study at the site, she became enamored with Palenque's iconography and with the mysterious inscriptions as seen in its stone carvings which culminated in her participation in the First Palenque Roundtable organized by Merle Greene Robertson in 1973. This is the story of Linda's awakening to the ancient Maya, to art history and to Maya epigraphy.



Linda's growing passion for the Maya is evident in this early painting of a Maya man exploring the jungle.

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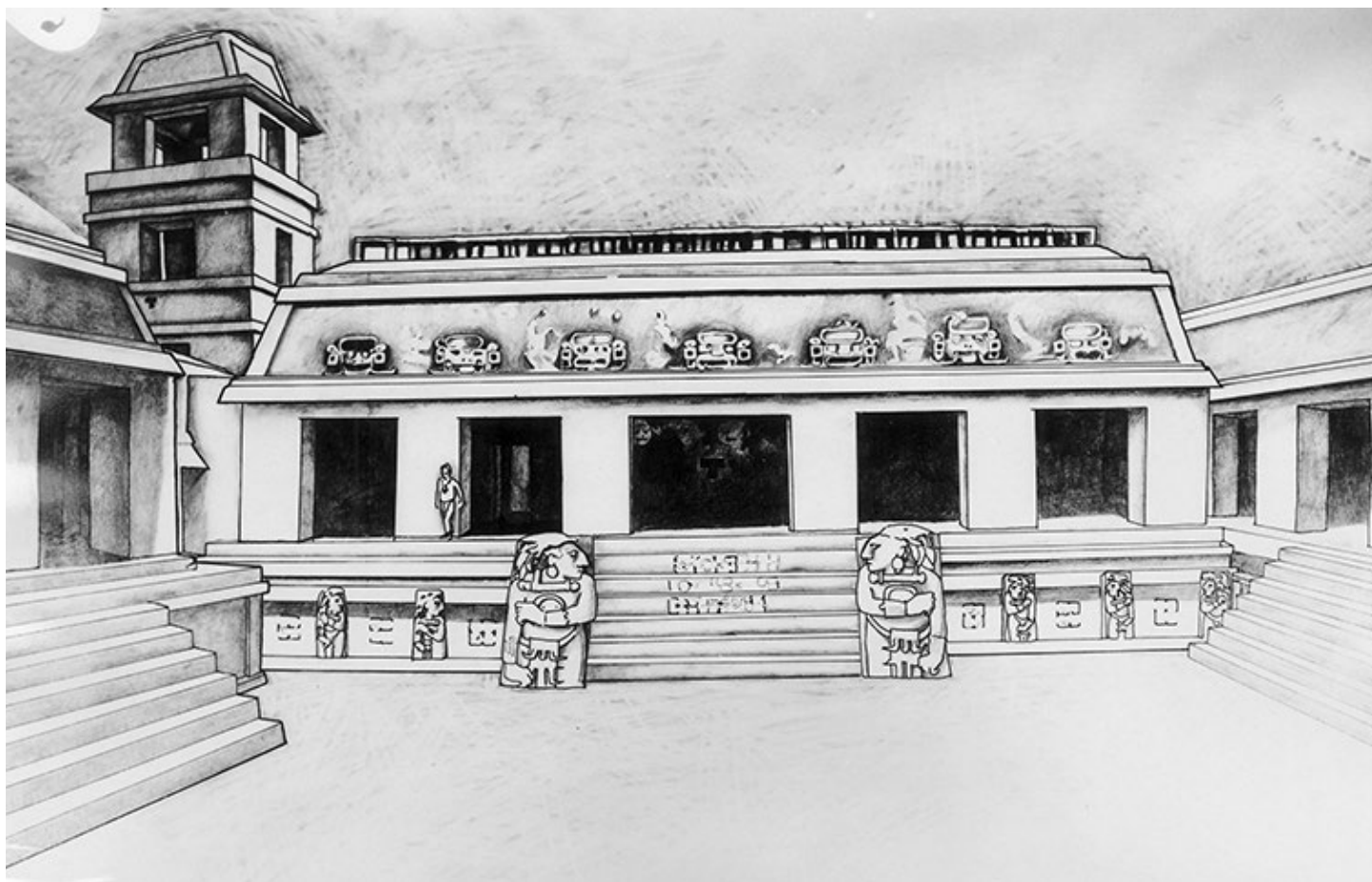


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The Institute of Maya Studies is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Membership dues and contributions are tax-deductible to the fullest extent allowed by the I.R.S.



One of Linda's drawings of the inner courtyard of the Palace at Palenque. This image is not a part of the FAMSI or LACMA collections.

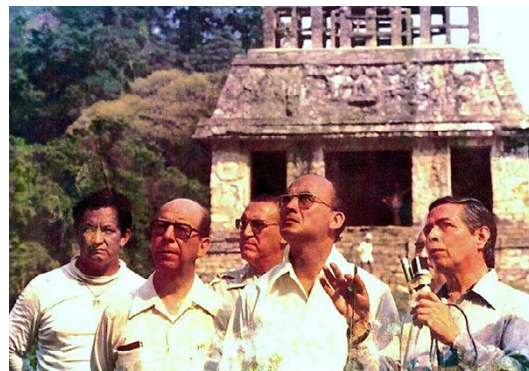
The Happy Accident – Linda Schele Meets Palenque, Moi, and Merle

by Elaine Schele *continued from page 5*

On her first visit, she drew small sketches in her notebook of some, but then realized that if she took bird's-eye-view photos of the temples and the Palace she could work on these at home by projecting the photos onto paper attached to a wall, tracing them, and then making final large-scale drawings. In addition to the drawings, she wrote two unpublished papers. One was about the architecture of the Palace called "Observations on the Palace at Palenque Chiapas" which she sent to George Kubler at the end of 1972. In his return letter, he thanked her for sending it to him and told her that he agreed with almost everything she wrote. It had only been two years since she had first visited Palenque.

That must have given her a shot of confidence.

This trip set a precedent for future field trips to Palenque and to Mesoamerica. She traveled there at every opportunity, including Christmas breaks and in the summer. Usually, Linda would create an itinerary where she visited new archaeological sites, photographed monuments and architecture, and then head for Palenque for a few days or even weeks. In addition, she read everything she could find regarding the ancient Maya. Within three years, she would transform herself from a studio painting teacher into a well-respected and controversial Maya scholar.



Moi (far right) giving a tour of Palenque to dignitaries

That first visit to Palenque changed the Schele's lives. Not only did Linda fall in love with the study of the ancient Maya, but over the years of visiting Palenque, she also gained much affection for the many Mayanists she met through Merle's network of accomplished and respected scholars. They were highly supportive of this enthusiastic newcomer as she struggled to find a place for herself in their academic world. 🏛️