

# HEART OF CREATION

The Mesoamerican World  
and the Legacy of Linda Schele

Edited by

ANDREA STONE



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*The Mesoamerican World and the  
Legacy of Linda Schele*

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Andrea Stone

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*This book is dedicated to the memory of R. Benton (Ben) Leaf, by profession a Baltimore banker, by avocation a student of Maya epigraphy under Linda Schele. He followed her footsteps into the underworld on January 17, 1999.*

# Acknowledgments

Many individuals generously contributed their time and energy to this “labor of love” for a great Mayanist who left us all too soon at the height of her creative energy, intellectual powers, and leadership role in the arena of Maya studies. For assisting this tribute to Linda Schele, I would like to thank the director and staff of Pre-Columbian Studies at Dumbarton Oaks, which hosted me for a fellowship in 1998–99. The present volume was conceived and initially organized there, something that would have been impossible, or certainly much delayed, without the luxury of a Dumbarton Oaks fellowship. The cooperation of Linda’s husband, David, was essential. He made her work available for reprinting and assisted in other small details. Simply put, without David’s blessing, the project would have been scuttled. Alice Kehoe’s comments on a draft of the introduction, as always, improved my writing. I extend thanks to two anonymous reviewers for their careful reading of the manuscript. They supplied more than the usual number of good suggestions for revision. Retired professor of Spanish at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Pierre Ullman kindly corrected the Spanish text and my translation of it. I am deeply grateful to all of the volume contributors; obviously without them this tribute would not have been possible. It is always a pleasure to work with friends, but especially so in this situation. I suspect that the spirit of the enterprise and their feelings for Linda made them a tad more cooperative than usual, much to my benefit. Tony Aveni was most helpful in locating the artwork that decorates the cover, a magnificent starry sky over the Pyramid of the Magicians at Uxmal created by Von Del Chamberlain, former director of the Hansen Planetarium in Salt Lake City. Von Del has generously allowed us to reproduce the photograph in honor of Linda to whom he showed the glories of the night sky in the planetarium theater in 1992. As might be expected, Linda was thrilled to see the Maya creation event writ large in the stars, and the experience of showing it to her was equally memorable for Von Del. I am indebted to Judy Knight of the University of Alabama Press for trying to make the editing process as painless as possible, even doing some of the “grunt” work herself when I could not meet her deadlines. She was quick acting

and hands-on all the way through, rare qualities these days in a busy press editor. If it were not for her initial enthusiasm, this project would never have seen the light of day. The copy editor, Kathy Swain, showed patience and good humor as we sorted out endless details over the Internet.

This book is dedicated to Ben Leaf, who started out like hundreds of other avocational Mayanists, regularly attending the Texas hieroglyphic workshops where Linda Schele and the comradery of other like-minded folk drew him into serious glyph studies. Though maintaining his day job as a banker, Ben went on to be a fairly accomplished epigrapher. His most notable contribution is to the discovery of a future verbal form, **ut-om**, “it will happen.” In a sense, Ben’s is a textbook case of how the Texas workshops enriched the lives of nonacademics who not only benefited socially, emotionally, and intellectually from them but also reaped the rewards of making their own contributions to the field and eventually becoming glyph teachers themselves. The measure of Ben’s affection for Linda, who got him into all of this, is evident in the fact that he flew to Guatemala to attend the service when her ashes were buried at Lake Atitlan. Unfortunately, he, like Linda, was taken away suddenly and prematurely, just a matter of months after her death. Although I cannot thank Ben now for letting me hitch a ride in his rented car to see archaeological sites in Yucatan some ten years ago, I can point out that he was the perfect layman-student of the ancient Maya under Linda Schele’s tutelage.

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# I



## Introduction

Andrea Stone

The last time I saw Linda Schele was in January of 1998. She had been battling pancreatic cancer since the previous summer, and her friends, gathering around her during this moment of crisis, held a symposium in her honor in Austin. The emotionally charged weekend culminated in a banquet, where I had the unexpected pleasure of sitting next to Linda. That evening we had a heart-to-heart talk, the most intimate I had ever had in the twenty years that I had known her. At its conclusion, I felt compelled to do something for my longtime mentor and blurted out that I would organize a session in her honor at the next meeting of the American Anthropological Association that was to be held in Philadelphia in December. Looking at me squarely in the eyes, she said: "I'll be there if I can."

Linda passed away a few months later, on April 18, 1998. On December 4 of that year the session was held, as promised. The speakers included Elin Danien, F. Kent Reilly III, Annabeth Headrick, Rex Koontz, Matthew Looper, Susan Milbrath, and Michael Coe, who served as discussant. The session was a cathartic experience for the covey of Linda admirers and curious onlookers who filled the hall that solemn winter evening. It began auspiciously, with the smell of copal incense filtering through the air, thanks, I later learned, to Duncan Earle, who was in the habit of doing this regardless of location or prevailing fire codes. Indeed, my thoughts turned to the smoke alarm system, which I was sure would go off at any moment and get us all thrown out of the room. Nevertheless, despite the steady stream of copal, the smoke alarm was silent, and the papers proceeded without a glitch. The first one was by Elin Danien, who spoke about Linda's role in the Maya hieroglyphic workshops. Precisely when she was talking about Linda, the microphone taped to the podium slipped and made a loud