

“Morley Hires Tatiana Proskouriakoff”

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Tatiana Proskouriakoff's reputation in Maya studies rests equally on her excellent reconstruction drawings (1946; Pollock, et al. 1962; Morley 1946; Smith 1950, 1955) and her seminal contributions to hieroglyphic decipherment, particularly her arguments for the historical content of Maya writing (1960, 1961, 1963, 1964). Proskouriakoff spent most of her professional life in the employ of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, perhaps the principal supporter of Maya studies in the first half of the twentieth century. This contribution presents a letter Sylvanus Morley wrote in 1939 seeking to hire Proskouriakoff and illuminates the beginning of her tenure with the Carnegie. Also published for the first time is a selection of Gustav Stromsvik's Copan Journals from 1939.

Proskouriakoff entered the Maya field in the mid-1930s, when her artwork and abilities as a draftsman came to the attention of Linton Satterthwaite at the University of Pennsylvania Museum.² Satterthwaite allowed Proskouriakoff to participate as an unpaid excavator in the 1936 and 1937 University Museum Piedras Negras Expeditions. When the team returned to Philadelphia after the 1937 Season, Satterthwaite suggested Proskouriakoff try her hand at making a reconstruction drawing of the Piedras Negras Acropolis. This she completed in her spare time.

In 1937 or 1938, the great Mayanist Sylvanus Morley visited the University Museum and saw this

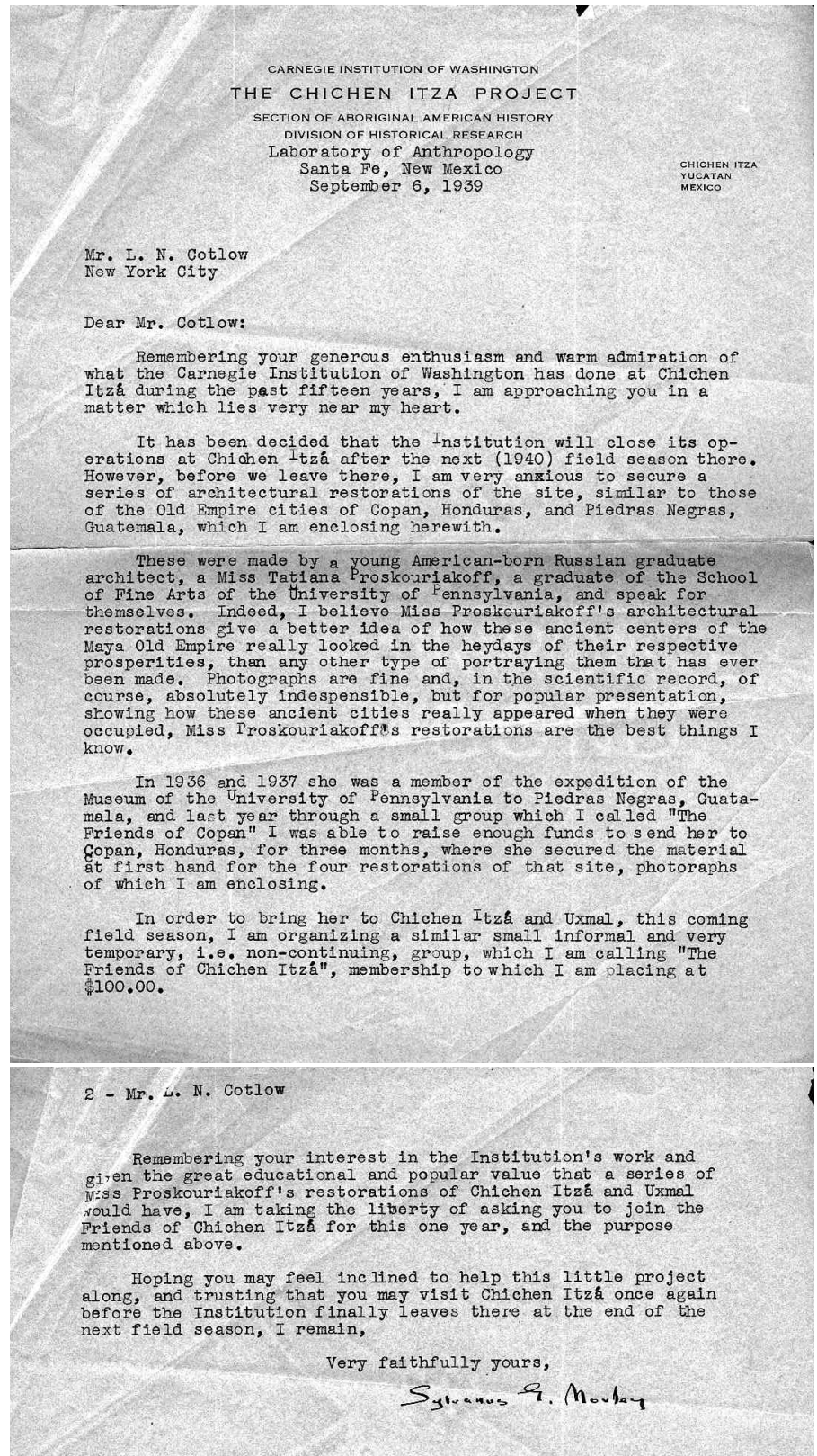


Figure 1: A scanned image of one of the letters of solicitation written by Morley on Chichén Itzá Project letterhead requesting funds to send Proskouriakoff to Yucatan in 1940. Courtesy Khristaan D. Villela.

drawing.³ He became very animated and urged Proskouriakoff to complete a series of reconstruction drawings. Before this time, only the Portuguese-born Santa Fe artist Carlos Vierra had essayed this kind of “wide angle” reconstruction view of ancient Maya ruins. Earlier publications featured reconstruction drawings of single structures, as in the cases of Tulum and Chichén Itzá, but none were quite like Proskouriakoff’s Piedras Negras Acropolis.⁴

Morley conceived a plan to hire Proskouriakoff to complete a series of reconstruction drawings for the Carnegie Institution of Washington. Peter Mathews recalls that the story of her transition from the University Museum to the Carnegie was one of her favorites. After Morley’s visit Satterthwaite told her that the Museum was unable to offer her a position. He decided to fire Proskouriakoff to ensure her smooth transition to Carnegie employ. Satterthwaite and Tania were close friends before this and remained so afterwards (Peter Mathews, personal communication 2000).

The fly in the ointment here was that the Carnegie did not fund Proskouriakoff’s appointment in 1938. Not only was the nation still sunk in the Depression, but Morley may not have even had the authority to hire Carnegie personnel. The Carnegie Institution appointed Morley research associate in 1914. Through the teens and twenties he steadily assumed responsibilities until he directed the Institution’s Maya program in its entirety, including not only the major projects at Chichén Itzá and Uaxactun, but also many collateral studies. This did not last. Morley was relieved of his overarching duties in 1929 when it became clear that he was best at managing just one project, at Chichén Itzá. A.V. Kidder assumed the directorship of the Carnegie programs in American archaeology and history.

Morley’s actions in 1938 and 1939 seem to bear out the fact that he was operating outside the Carnegie fiscal apparatus in hiring Proskouriakoff. He devised two fund-raising campaigns to send Proskouriakoff to Copan and Yucatan to gather data for reconstruction drawings. These he called “The Friends of Copan” and “The Friends of Chichén Itzá.” Solicitations of \$100.00 memberships in each group

proved successful, and Proskouriakoff traveled to Copan in February 1939. Gustav Stromsvik’s account of her visit to Copan appears later in this article.

Lewis Cotlow (Figure 1) was a well-known director of ethnographic films and author of such thrilling narratives as *Amazon Head-hunters* (1953), *Zanzabuku* (1956), and *In Search of the Primitive* (1966). Morley probably met Cotlow at one of the lectures he presented across the U.S. every fall. As Char Solomon pointed out to me and as is clear from published data on Proskouriakoff’s life, Morley incorrectly stated that she was an “American-born Russian.” Proskouriakoff was born in Tomsk, Siberia, and immigrated to the Philadelphia area in about 1915. Also incorrect is the statement that she graduated from the University of Pennsylvania. Although Proskouriakoff spent a year at Penn, she actually graduated (in 1930) from Pennsylvania State University.

Along with the letter, Morley sent seven photographs of preliminary versions of Proskouriakoff’s reconstruction drawings [Figures 2-8]. These were intended both as proof of the quality of her art and as a teaser for the kind of work she could complete, if funded, in Yucatan. These images are of great interest not only because they are preliminary versions, but also because two were never published in the 1946 *Album of Maya Architecture*. Although the final versions of many of Proskouriakoff’s drawings still exist, I have been unable to locate these preliminary drawings.⁵ She may have reworked them for publication. The illustrations accompanying this article are from Morley’s photographs, and may be the only records we have of the early versions of Proskouriakoff’s reconstructions.

The seven images feature scenes from the ruins of Copan and Piedras Negras. The Copan images of the Ballcourt, the East and West Courts, and the Hieroglyphic Stairway are specifically mentioned in the Stromsvik journals (see below) as locations Proskouriakoff investigated and photographed while at the site in 1939. The early version of the Ballcourt differs from the 1946 version in several important ways [Figure 2]. Not only is the angle of the sun and

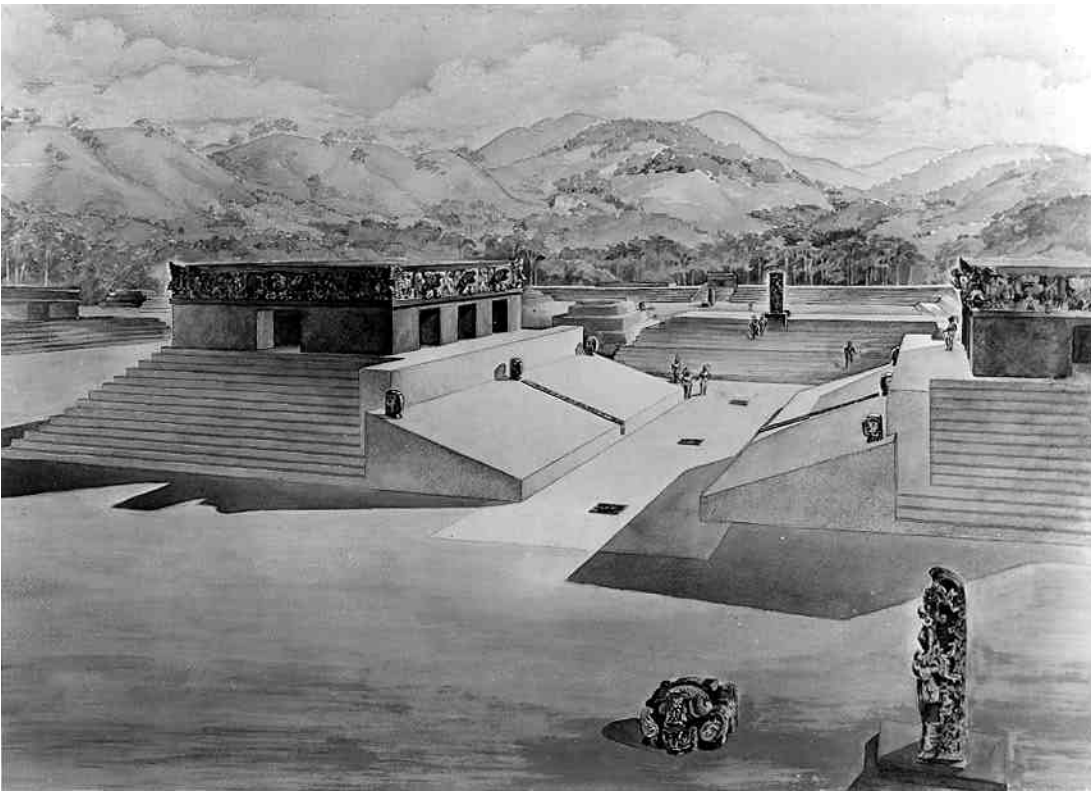


Figure 2: Copan, Ballcourt, preliminary version

shadows lower in the 1946 *Album*, but the ballgame is shown actually in progress.

Proskouriakoff's early version of the Copan East Court differs in several details of the Jaguar Stairway and the façade of Temple 22 [Figure 3]. The 1946 *Album* version also shows all three "false-ballcourt" markers set into the Court, whereas the early view shows only one.⁶ The preliminary renderings of the Hieroglyphic Stair and the West Court Reviewing Stand are essentially identical to the versions in the 1946 *Album* [Figures 4-5].

The early views of Piedras Negras differ most from the ver-

early version also portrays the monolithic façade stones on the north side of the Acropolis as prismatic, rather than the regular rectangles found in the 1946 *Album*.

sions published later. Best-known of Proskouriakoff's reconstruction drawings is her view of the Piedras Negras Acropolis from the Northwest (Figure 6). As mentioned above, this was the work Morley first saw and which convinced him to hire her. The early version of the view differs in such details as the staircase leading up from the interior court inside Structure J-5, and in the number of terraces on the south side upper reaches. The

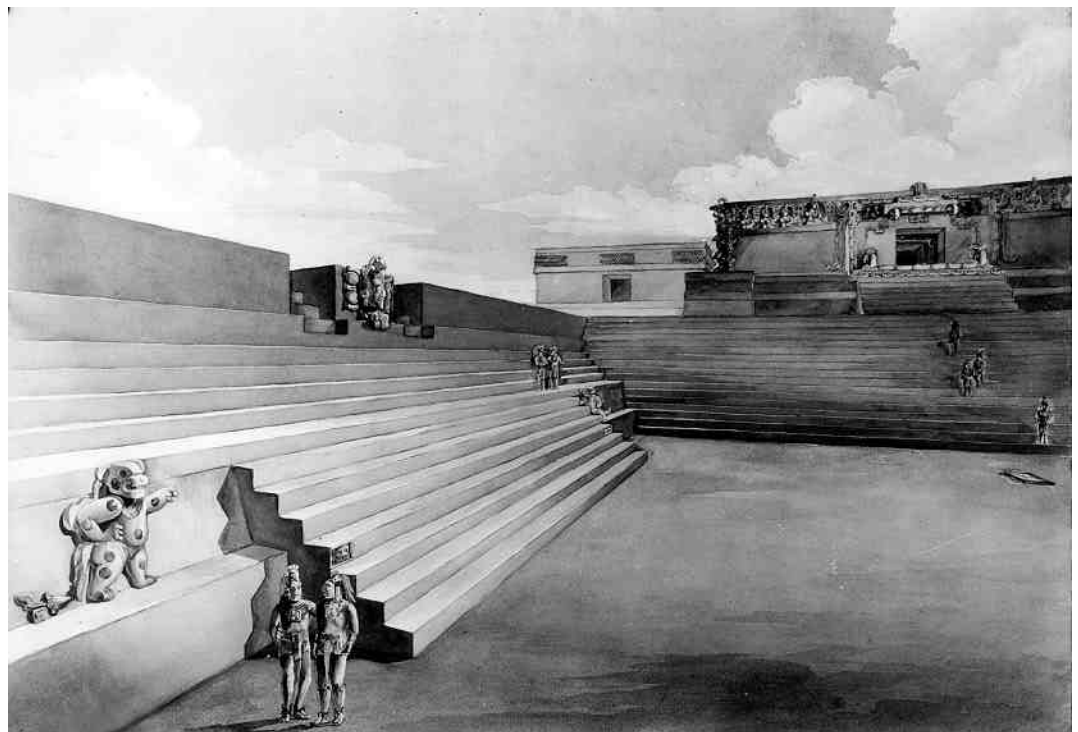


Figure 3: Copan, East Court, preliminary version



Figure 4: Copan, Hieroglyphic Stairway, preliminary version

Proskouriakoff's view of the Piedras Negras Acropolis looking North was not published in 1946 and is not well known [Figure 7]. As far as I have been able to discover, it was never published. Her view of Structure R3 from the Southeast also never appeared in the 1946 *Album* [Figure 8].

The "Friends of Chichén Itzá" was successful, and allowed Proskouriakoff to complete reconstruction drawings of Chichén Itzá and other sites in Yucatan.



Figure 5: Copan, West Court, preliminary version

Although she apparently was not drawing a salary from the Carnegie Institution, A.V. Kidder's Director's Report for 1938 mentions Proskouriakoff's visit to Copan and her drawing project (Kidder 1939). Morley's fund-raising activities evidently embarrassed the Carnegie Institution of Washington, and they finally agreed to offer her a paid position as a research associate in the early 1940s (Brunhouse 1971:275).⁷ Proskouriakoff went on to be one of the most important members of the Carnegie team.

The Morley solicitation letter and the Stromsvik Journals, published here for the first time, open a window on the beginning of the end of the Carnegie era in Maya archaeology. Less than a year later, Morley and the Carnegie Institution Maya project moved permanently out of the Hacienda Chichén, which they had occupied since 1923. Both relocated to the Hacienda Chénku in Northwest Mérida. The Chichén Project closed and the Carnegie Institution itself began to move steadily away from archaeology and towards physics and other war-related hard sciences.

Stromsvik Journals on Proskouriakoff at Copan

The following are excerpts from Gustav Stromsvik's daily field diaries. Stromsvik directed the Carnegie Institution investigations at Copan beginning in 1935 and lasting until the mid-1940s. Carnegie project and area directors were required to file this kind of diary with the Director of the Division of Historical Research, who in this period was A.V. Kidder (Director, 1929-1950). These typescript diaries are housed in the Sylvanus Morley Collection at the Laboratory of Anthropology, a unit of the Museum of New Mexico, in Santa Fe. Morley was a longtime resident of Santa Fe who generally spent the summer months in that ancient city. For more than thirty years beginning in the 1920s, he was given summer offices at the Palace of the Governors in Santa Fe or at the Laboratory of Anthropology (the latter built in 1932). In 1947, the Museum Regents named Morley Director of the combined School Of American Research and the Museum of New Mexico-Laboratory of Anthropology, a position he held until his death in September 1948. His books and some papers are still housed in the library at the Laboratory.

The Stromsvik daily field reports at the Laboratory of Anthropology span the years 1937-1946. Stromsvik was a native of Norway, and English was clearly not his first language. I have noted some spelling errors. Being field dairies, these were not edited for content, grammar, or punctuation. Below I present only those entries specifically mentioning Tatiana Proskouriakoff. I note wherever the entry is

excerpted. Note that there are sometimes daily reports for days between those reproduced below, but they did not directly mention Proskouriakoff or her work at Copan. I supplied all bracketed items.

Monday Feb. 20, 1939⁸

Hired 20 men and 4 masons, set them to their appointed work, in the museum in the ruins and shard digging.⁹ Wire from Tatiana Proskouriakoff asking for mules to meet her at the bridge on Thursday.¹⁰

Stanley [Boggs] starting a front elevation and a plan of the north side of Temple 11, after we had decided Triks drawings were too small scale to be workable.¹¹

Started new test pit just south of mound #40 on the south side of Acropolis; two men diggings.

All of us pitched in and built some shelves [sic.] for

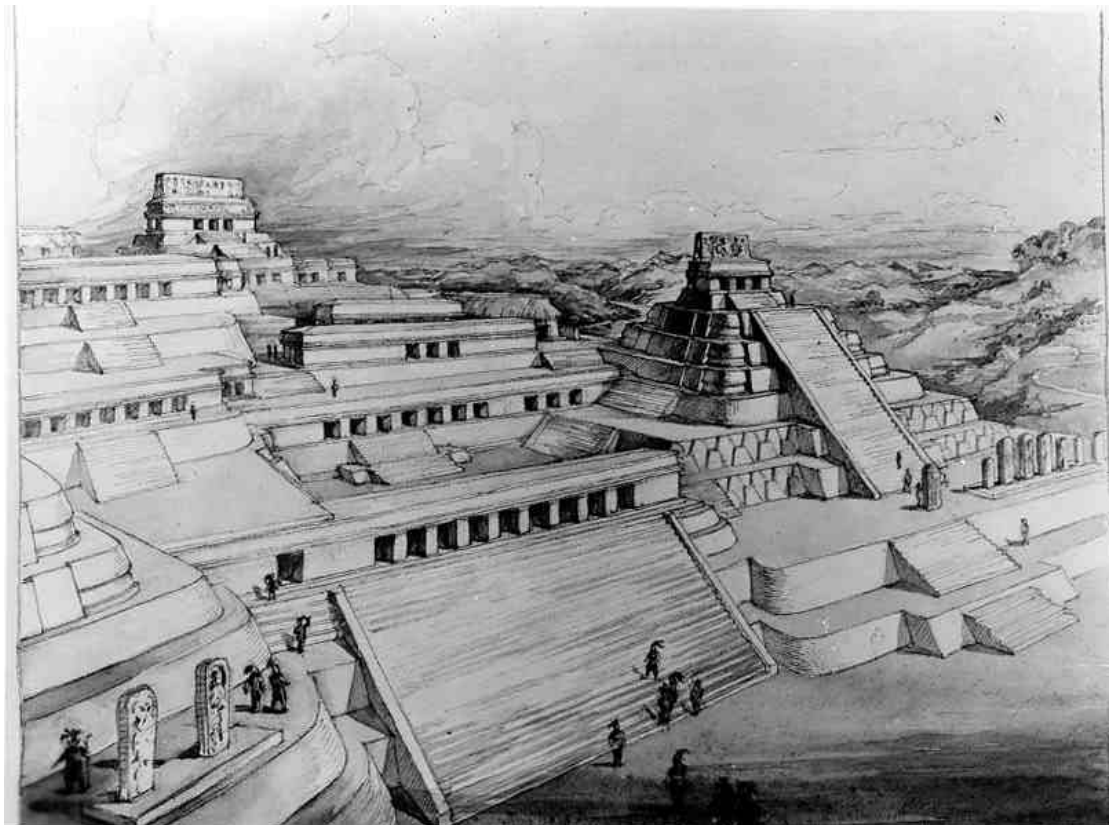


Figure 6: Piedras Negras, Acropolis, Northwest view, preliminary version



Figure 7: Piedras Negras Acropolis, North view, preliminary version

John [Longyear], to have a place where to store his potshards.

The village is seriously considering tearing down the old ruined church front to build a new one, but it seems like old don Rafael who is president of the church building comity [sic.] have [sic.] been careless with the funds. After over four years of gathering funds together only \$10.50 were found in the treasury. So I expect the building will be delayed while more fund gathering takes place.

Wednesday Feb. 22, 1939

[Excerpt]

Arranged for mules to meet Miss Proskouriakoff by the bridge tomorrow. Also sent an extra mule to bring in some stuff ordered from Guatemala; Plaster of Paris, paper bags, brushes, etc.

Thursday February 23, 1939

Went out to the ruins with Stanley to try and help him lay clear some of his problems on the north side

of Temple #11. The main reason for starting work there is to solidify the mound; preventing any existing evidences of archaeologically important features to be lost, besides protecting Stela "N" just below, from further damage, no restoration [sic.] of any extent is to be attempted; only such things that can with assurance be placed in its proper place while the work of solidification goes on.

Gave Stanley two men to help tear down

some of the loose debris laying precariously above where work have [sic.] to be done, and to block and brace up such big stones as were considered advisable to leave there for the time being.

Finished painting the "Escudo" over the entrance of the Museum and had the scaffolding taken away. Test 2-39 gave out after only about 1m dept. Tatiana Proskouriakoff arrived about 4:30 in time for tea.

Friday Feb. 24, 1939

Went out to the ruins with Tatiana and Stanley; made a round of introduction starting with the Great Court and ending on top of Temple #11. Where we sat for quite a while discussing various problems. One idea I think is well worthy of mentioning: When temple was originally built it had a long wide front room with a set of stairs leading up on either side of the center hall. Tatiana suggested a "material" roof had been used and the stairs led up onto the flat roof. That fact that stairs had been discarded when the secondary walls were built and the comparatively few roofstones found would substantiate this idea

some. (The idea is that only the narrow secondary room had been roofed with the secondary vault). Work at the different places goes on as usually. Went to the carpenter and ordered a drawing table for Tatiana 1m x .75, made of cedro, at a cost of \$.75, to be ready soonest possible.

Saturday Feb. 25, 1939

[Excerpt]

Out to the ruins; helped Tatiana orientate [sic.] herself about the Ballcourt which she is photographing preparatory [sic.] to drawing it.

Monday Feb. 27, 1939

[Excerpt]

Hired 4 masons and 20 laborers, besides the 4 men Col. Rivera let me have from his troop. Tatiana started her survey of the Ballcourt with one man helping.

Thursday March 2, 1939

In the morning I went out to the ruins with Tatiana to try and explain some of what had happened in the Ballcourt; while going over the ground and arguing the points, it became evident that both facades of both Temp. #9 and 10 facing Ballcourt, are identical which makes both east and west facades of Temple 9 the same. It also was found that the back wall of the sloping bench (vertical wall at upper end of bench joining with terrace) overlapped onto bench about .25 and started up on either side on third step, north and south sides.

Wire from cement truck that the cement is in "Vado Hondo" sent mules.

Wire from Eugenio Interiano that they were leaving San Salvador with George.

Tourist plane from Guatemala and Dr. Chamberlin came to stay a few days. Catching spiders and scorpions.

Monday March 6, 1939

[Excerpt]

Tatiana drawing up her Ballcourt and seems to do a fine job of it.

March 8, 1939

[Excerpt]

At the ruins talking Hieroglyphic stairway with Tatiana, she does not seem to like the arrangement I suggested: The terraces doesn't [sic.] meet she say! And the angle is wrong. Maybe but neither she nor we had very much evidences to go by. Naturally she want something that looks good and still conform with the scanty evidences existing. Well, so do I, only I do not know how to go about it. Suggesting some more digging at the top where remnants of terraces were seen to see if more indicating triffls [sic.] can be found.

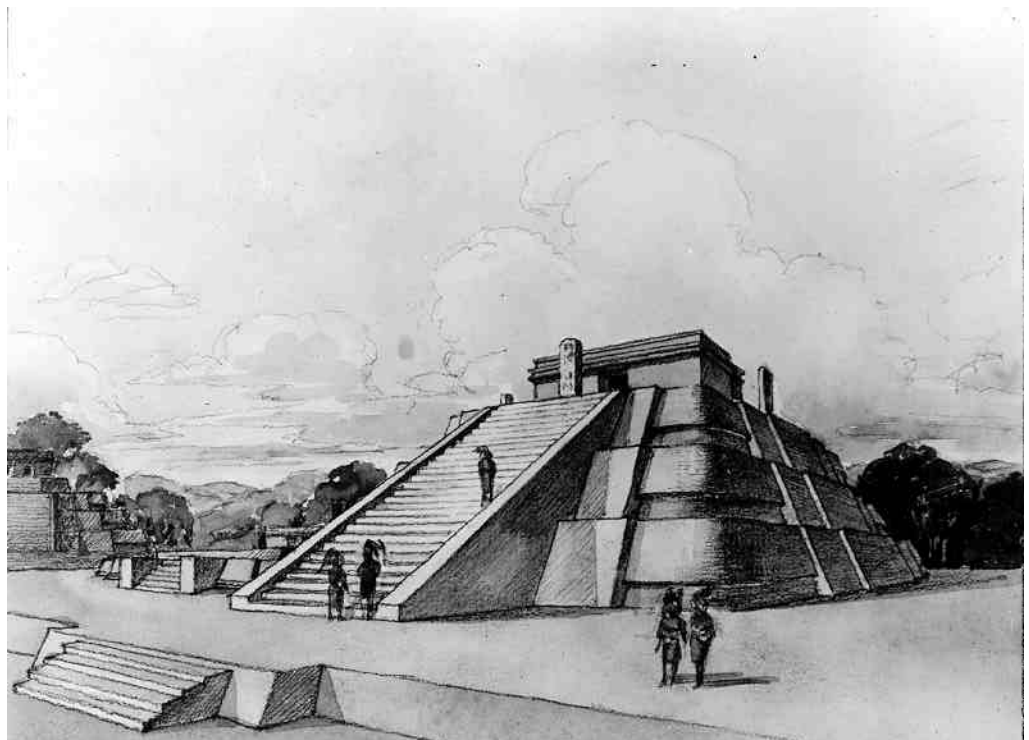


Figure 8: Piedras Negras, Structure R3, Southeast view, preliminary version

Monday March 13, 1939

[Excerpt]

Tatiana has one man poking around the Hieroglyphic stairway. Stanley has four men on his job, which still mainly consists of dismantling the side above Stela N. before solidification can start. John [Longyear] started a new test pit at the south side of the Acropolis just to the east of Mound #36.

Wednesday March 15, 1939

[Excerpt]

Copan Museum opens. General fiesta.

Friday March 24, 1939

Worked most of the day on the truck, trying to hook up a broken steering knuckle which was done after a fashion and the truck was again in service.

At the ruins tried to explain something about the Hierogl. Stairway to Tatiana. I never realized how difficult this was, nor how little is known about this unit. Will have to do quite a bit of digging here to try and find some more evidence.

A complete four-legged redware dish was found in (trench or) pit 4-39; 2 similar dishes was [sic.] found when excavating around Stela "C" in the great court.

Monday April 3, 1939

[Excerpt]

Out to the ruins to see how work goes with the few men on the job; found Tania sketching, she had found part of the serpents body that goes over the headdress of the lowest seated figure, clearing away debris around the museum from resent [sic.] paving and plastering. Warm day.

Tuesday April 4, 1939

[Excerpt]

Looking over the finishing up and clearing about and in the museum. Went out to the ruins with Tania who is on the go after her success yesterday. We were try-

ing to fix the positions of the two unplaced elements in the Balustrade of the Hieroglyphic Stairway.

April 12, 1939

[Excerpt]

Finally they left¹² and I could talk with Dr. Kidder for a while, trying to explain some of what has been done and why.¹³ One very distressing feature popped up by Tania's questioning why I had built the south terrace of Temp 11 so high without a break. One reason, we knew the height of the terrace but could find no trace of any set backs or such. This must be checked. If it should be proved to be wrong of course it must be changed.

April 13, 1939

The Kidders left at 7 sharp and ought to reach Zacapa in good time. At the Ruins, Stan. Tania and I discussed terrace on south side of 11. Dug into the corner at east end, towards Mound #25 and there in the corner were evidences that there actually was a step-back or break in the raise, making a cornice about .60 above the niches with a narrow platform of about .75 wide then a batter wall topped with another cornice, the top of which hooks up with the floor of the wide terrace running all around the substructure of #11.

Tore down seated figure in restored section in Hierogl. Stair to exchange for other that will look more in place.

Letter from Grillmaker Guatemala that he wanted \$50.00 advance before starting work. Wrote him letter to included check for amount.¹⁴

Monday April 17, 1939

Hired 5 masons and 25 laborers. Went out to the ruins to find a place for them where they could be most effective. While I was explaining to mason in Hierogl. Stairs a soldier came running up saying I must come to the telephone in the house in the Flying field. Went to see what it was all about. The telegr. office in town had an urgent wire for me from

the President saying that the Ambassador [sic.] from Mexico and the Minister of War (Honduran) [sic.] would arrive there about 9, that I would please take charge of the flying field to see that there were no hitch. Told Andres to find enough men to form a guard of honor of 10 and to have everything in order by the given time. Met them at time and took them over ruins and Museum. The Mex. Minister said he had met me in Chichén Itzá; both were much impressed with the ruins.

Wired Guatemala for permission to leave for Ann Shepard also for car to be here tomorrow morning.

John Longyear started a dig on Rafael Villamil's land somewhat above group #5. Tania is having the lower terraces cleared on the southside of Hierogl. Stairway. Also on the north side of the stairs about half way up the hill we are digging for traces of terraces; two rows of sagged stones were found corresponding to the first row of vertical wall. These corresponded nicely to steps "L" and "G" (Peabody lettering, upper section).

Digging for terraces on the south side of the Stairway following the lowest one up against the out-jutting below mound #24, a set of narrow steps were found in the corner, looks like steps leading from terrace to terrace. Tania took measures and drawings of same.

Several more hierogl. stones from Panel in east doorway to #11 was [sic.] found. Started numbering them for taking them to town to be set up in Museum.

Tuesday April 18, 1939

Looking for the lacking stones of the glyph panel we are bringing to town but without any luck. Waiting for car to come for Ann Shepard. John and George arranged for a trip up to Rio Amarillo to dig for shards by the stela there.

Tania is measuring and drawing corner of lower terrace south of Hierogl. Stair. Went around with her trying to explain what sculpture and motives belonged to Temple #22; she wants to form an idea what the decoration looked like. Arguing about

Temple #11 and the decoration there: four big alligator heads on each corner with a gigantic human figure in some position also on each corner. Enormous hands and feet found by three corners. Col. Rivera returned somewhat restored.

Filadelfo Navarro arrived at 6:30 P.M. when he should have been here in time to leave this morning. Told him so. Filadelfo brought a welcome box from Guatemala. Ann Shepard decided to stay over night to leave early in the morning.

Wednesday April 26, 1939

Went around the ruins with Tania to see if we agreed on most points on what she has drawn and points we might resolve for future: Ballcourt and mounds #9 and #10 are clear enough; the Hierogl. Stairway is an entirely different matter; lacking most proofs; no terraces to check by, but in the main issue we agree; it is the only place where the material from the stairs can be exhibited, regardless of correctness of reconstruction, there most likely never will be found anymore data to check by than what we have right now and that isn't much, but as long as it looks fairly well and no far fetched [sic.] ideas are applied it should be alright. In Temple #11 it is very difficult to decide, not much restoration can be done without digging it completely out all around, and we are struggling to solidify it and not tear it any more to pieces. At the jaguar stairway I pointed out to her that there was a fairly narrow stairway leading up to platform #25 on either side the big center mask, that formed a dividing panel between the two.

Talked over with Stanley what he had to do on Temple 11 in the time left. We want to leave it in such a state this season that we will not have to do anymore with it in the future, except perhaps sticking up a Hierogl. stone should such be found. Photographs should be taken of each separate Hierogl. stone that is not replaced and these should be stored in a safe place (the stone) right near where they belong.

Settled bills with Tania, Filadelfo turned up in good time for a change bringing 10 sacks of cement, the rest of the last cement we will buy this season.

Filadelfo have [sic.] been bringing a few sacks every time he has come lately, which makes it somewhat cheaper than hiring a truck to bring it.

Thursday April 27, 1939

Tania left in good time to catch the noon train in Acapa [i.e. Zacapa]. Went to the ruins and tried to hurry work in the Hieroglyphic Stairway, but having only one mason there does not seem to progress very much. Over on #11 a couple big roots had to be dug out on the east side of North doorway and the holes will have to be built in with masonry; this will take some time.

Today is "Dia de los Telegrafistas" in Honduras and here is no Telegraphic service, all of them having vacation and fiesta today.

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Endnotes

1. Director, Thaw Art History Center, College of Santa Fe, New Mexico.

2. For details of Proskouriakoff's life, see Graham 1990, Stuart 1992, Coe 1992, Marcus 1988, and the forthcoming biography by Char Solomon.

3. Unfortunately, Morley's journal makes no mention of this meeting. Char Solomon informs me that neither does Proskouriakoff's journal (Char Solomon, personal communication 1999). The details are supplied by Graham 1990, and a brief mention in Brunhouse 1971.

4. See Lothrop 1924 (Tulum, Castillo); Totten 1926 (Chichén Itzá, Upper Temple of the Jaguars); Morris, Charlott, and Morris 1931 (Chichén Itzá, Temple of the Warriors). National Geographic Magazine also published some brightly-colored reconstruction scenes by H.M. Herget in the November 1935 and November 1936 issues.

5. If they still exist, they may be in the Carnegie Archives at the Peabody Museum at Harvard.

6. See Miller 1988 for a discussion of "false ball-courts" at Copan.

7. However, Proskouriakoff does not reappear in the

Carnegie Year Books until 1944, when Kidder noted in his annual report that the *Album of Maya Architecture* was now in press. The war delayed its release two years, until 1946 (Kidder 1944).

8. The Gustav Stromsvik Journals are published thanks to the Morley Collection in the Library at the Laboratory of Anthropology, Museum of New Mexico, Santa Fe.

9. Stromsvik refers to the Museum in the town plaza of Copan Ruinas. He supervised its design and construction. He also carved the Honduras seal still found above the doorway.

10. During this period, there was a road covering the 17 km from the border with Guatemala. However, it often washed out, forcing the use of mules. There was also a rough road, sometimes passable, coming into Copan from the other direction, from Santa Rita. Many visitors also flew to Copan in the late 1930s. As we see, Proskouriakoff arrived on mules, and left in a car.

11. Aubrey Trik excavated Temple 22 and began excavations of Temple 11. He resigned from the Carnegie crew at the end of the 1938 Season.

12. This was the local priest and the secretary to the Papal Nuncio.

13. Dr. and Mrs. Kidder arrived April 10 with Anna Shepard, stayed until April 13.

14. These were the window grills for the Copan Museum.