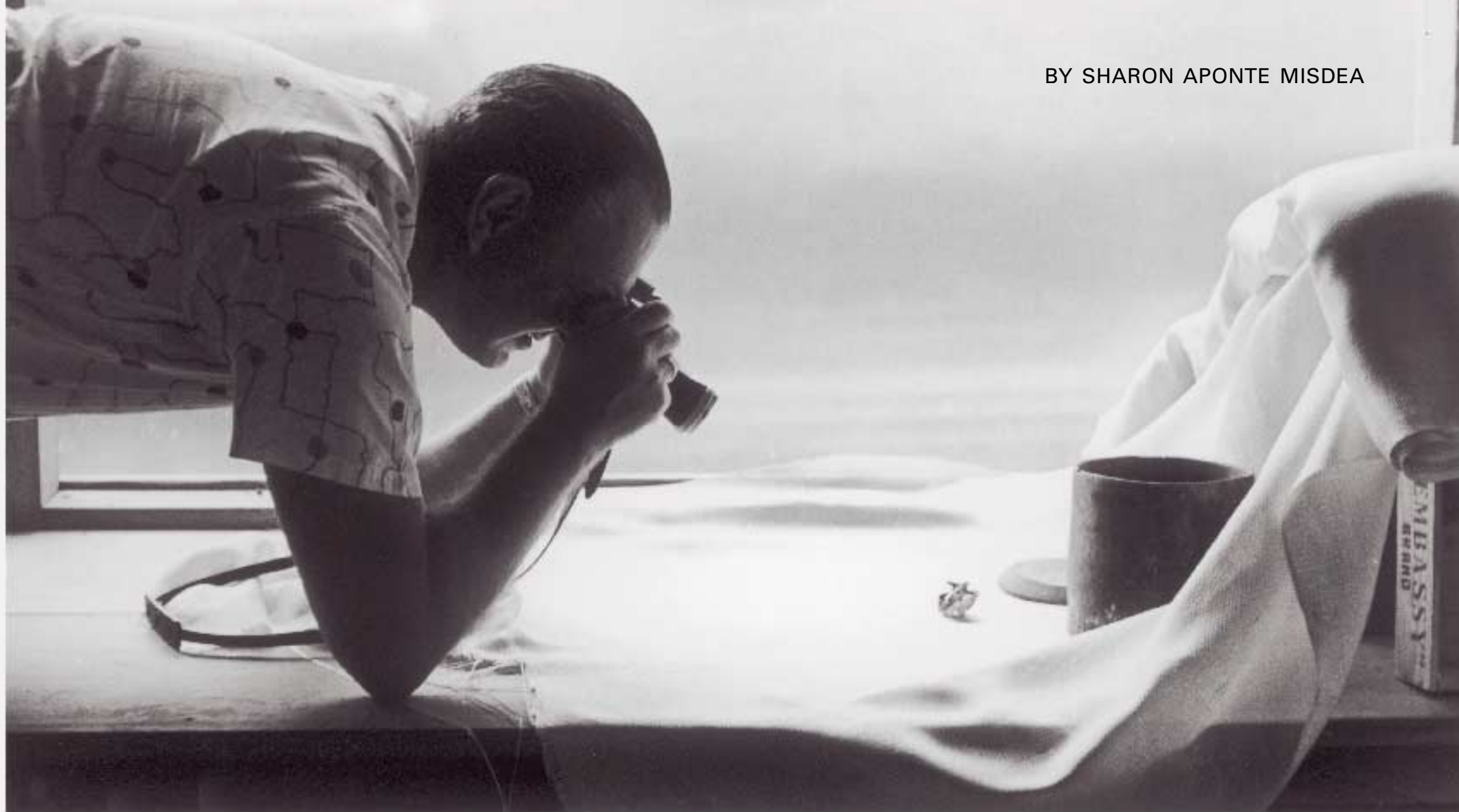


A VISUAL HISTORY OF
archaeology AT

tikal

BY SHARON APONTE MISDEA



JOYA HAIRS

LEFT: A picture within a picture: Visiting photographer Leonel Stein is captured on film while at work. He is seen here photographing a jade and shell mosaic mask found inside the vessel to the right. Jamaican-born photographer Joya Hairs took up residency in Guatemala in 1947 and served as the Tikal Project's agent in Guatemala City. As a reward for processing the roll of film that contained images of the then just-discovered earliest carved monument (Stela 29), Ed Shook, then project director, invited Hairs and her assistant to Tikal as project guests. Thus began her involvement in photography at Tikal and her history as a "Mayaphile." A number of her photos appear on panels in the Tikal Museum and in illustrated books on modern Maya life in Guatemala. TOP: Temple 1 as it looked in 1968 after excavation and restoration.

Since its introduction in the mid-19th century, photography has played a prominent role in documenting archaeological sites. Photographs record excavations and artifacts, compiling visual inventories that become mnemonic tools during the lab work and analysis that follow completed fieldwork. But beyond such traditional



LEFT: In 1948, Ed Shook (left) formally proposed the investigation of Tikal to the Museum's board of managers. Political upheaval in Guatemala delayed Shook's leave from the Carnegie Institution, for which he supervised excavations at Uaxactun until 1956. He assumed the directorship of the Tikal Project from 1956 to 1961, during which time he guided the establishment of Tikal National Park. Seated to the right of Shook are visiting Mexican archaeologists I. Cortina, Ignacio Bernal, and Alberto Ruz. Bernal directed projects at Monte Alban and Teotihuacan. Ruz discovered the famous tomb of K'inich Janaab' PaKal I, a king of Palenque. Walwin "Charlie" Barr, Shook's father-in-law, took this photograph when he was at Tikal for the 1957 season. Having recently retired from the Lowell Technological Institute, where he worked in the textile design department for 50 years, Barr's attraction to Guatemala was primarily its textiles. It was at Lowell that he learned photography from an early mentor.

RIGHT: While intended as a publicity photo of ceramics from Burial 116, Bill Coe's 1963 image captured Guatemalan project members and students at ease. Many students trained at Tikal would go on to play prominent roles in Guatemalan archaeology. Then a student, Juan Pedro Laporte (center looking down) went on to direct the Proyecto Nacional de Tikal, the Guatemalan project that assumed responsibility for the archaeology of Tikal in 1979. Standing are staff members Jose-Luis Leiva (left), who lost his life during political unrest in Guatemala in the 1980s, and Ismael Tercero. Seated in front are then students Marcelino Gonzales, who went on to become the head of restoration for the Institute of Anthropology and History in Guatemala; Dora Guerra, who later married Gonzales and directed the National Museum in Guatemala City; and Norma Garcia, who also went on to work for the Institute. Many prominent Guatemalans were also part of the achievements at Tikal, including restoration architect Rudy Larios, who recently directed the Copan Acropolis Archaeological Project; Miguel Orrego, who continues to work with the Guatemalan Tikal Project today; and Rafael Morales, who would become director of the Tikal National Park.



COMPANION WEB SITE
More images from the Tikal Project may be viewed online at www.museum.upenn.edu/TDAP.

TOP: WALWIN BARR. TIKAL PROJECT NEG. #57-8-24; BOTTOM: WILLIAM COE. TIKAL PROJECT NEG. #63-4-1524



Procuring water was just one of the many difficulties to be overcome in the Petén jungle during the life of the Tikal Project. Ultimately, *aguadas* made by the ancient Maya would be cleared and reused by the project for water storage. George Holton, who captured this moment at the camp aguada in 1956, was a well-traveled North American photographer with a home at Lake Atitlan, Guatemala. He was involved with the Tikal Project from the outset, and his photos were instrumental in documenting the difficulties inherent in the project and generating public interest and financial support for the undertaking. Many of Holton's images appear on Guatemalan postcards today. His photos from Tikal that were part of Ed Shook's personal collection are now archived in Antigua, Guatemala.

GEORGE HOLTON. TIKAL PROJECT NEG. #56-3-20

categories of documentation, photographs also capture, both intentionally and unintentionally, the life of an archaeological project. These images reflect the living dynamics of archaeological camps and local communities. Some images are posed and constructed for publicity purposes, while others are spontaneous and candid — meant to be seen by only a small circle. As they freeze intimate moments, the candid shots later help us understand the history of archaeological inquiry and pursuit. As archaeological historian and theoretician Michael Shanks

explains, "It is the detective work and experience of doing archaeology that interest so many people, as much as the things found." Shanks reminds us that archaeology is as much about the people and ideas involved in recovering the past as it is about the past.

Professional photographers and researchers created more than 60,000 photographic images from 1956 to 1970, when the University of Pennsylvania Museum carried out archaeological investigations at the ancient Maya city of Tikal in Guatemala. A great many of those images



LEFT: Workers raising lintels on Temple 1. This 1959 photo by project member Stuart Scott captured the spirit and dedication of local workers. Without their skill, the project could never have been completed. Many were exceptional excavators from whom project archaeologists learned a great deal. Local workers today will often refer to their fathers and grandfathers who also worked with Penn archaeologists at Tikal or Piedras Negras. Scott spent one season at Tikal and went on to a long career in Mesoamerican and Polynesian archaeology.

BELOW: “Doña Odilas’ Party.” In 1957, the first lady of Guatemala (standing third from left) arrived with at least six planes with President Carlos Castillo Armas and a host of Guatemalan dignitaries for one of many annual presidential luncheons that would take place at Tikal. The Guatemalan government contributed half of the \$2 million cost of the 15-year Tikal Project.



“They stepped out of the plane attired as if they were going into a ballroom. Low-necked dresses, high heels, and bare arms. Tikal is no place for that kind of dress!”

—ED SHOOK ON THE ARRIVING GUATEMALAN DIGNITARIES

▶ THE TIKAL DIGITAL ACCESS PROJECT

The University of Pennsylvania’s Tikal Project, carried out between 1956 and 1970, represents a milestone in the history of Maya research. The entire Tikal archive is housed in the University of Pennsylvania Museum. It includes field notes, photographic negatives and prints, slides, excavation drawings, and an extensive card catalog. Special collections housed with this material include the Satterthwaite Library, slide collections donated by original project members, and the personal papers of project members. In its present form, this unique archive is difficult to access, which greatly diminishes its value and use. The long-term preservation of this irreplaceable archive is also threatened because it is perishable (it is composed largely of paper and photographic records).

A project aimed at converting the entire Tikal Project archives into a fully accessible and securely preserved digital database began in February 2002, implemented by Sharon Aponte Misdea and supervised by Robert Sharer in conjunction with Christopher Jones. The goals of the project are, first, to inventory and curate the Penn Tikal Project archive in its original form and, second, to develop a Web-accessible database of the Penn Tikal Project data and collections. The pilot phase of this project was generously supported by the Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies (FAMSI). An online database of 500 sample images from the Penn Tikal Project photographic archive is available on FAMSI’s Web site at www.famsi.org.

LEFT: STUART SCOTT, TIKAL PROJECT NEG. #59-17-267; RIGHT: WILLIAM R. COE, TIKAL PROJECT NEG. #60-4-18

Tikal Project archaeologist Nick Hellmuth photographed Linton Satterthwaite and Chris Jones in 1965 recording glyphs on the Temple of the Inscriptions (Temple VI). Satterthwaite, captured with his hand clinging to the scaffolding, was desperately afraid of heights. Epigrapher and chief archaeologist for the Tikal Project in its early years, Satterthwaite had previously directed excavations at Piedras Negras, Guatemala, for the Museum and was Jones’s mentor. Nick Hellmuth earned his position on the Tikal Project in part owing to his skill as a photographer. After Hellmuth’s first visit in the early 1960s, Peter Harrison suggested he return to the project to continue his photographic work. While completing his undergraduate thesis research at Tikal, Hellmuth photographed Tikal both on the ground and from the air. He once commissioned a helicopter at his own expense to record spectacular aerial perspectives of the site. These images are familiar to Maya archaeology enthusiasts, since Hellmuth freely shares his photographs, including one that most recently appeared on the cover of Harrison’s *Lords of Tikal*. Under the auspices of the Foundation for Latin American Anthropological Research, which Hellmuth directs, he continues to pioneer photography in the field of Maya archaeology, particularly digital imaging technology.



NICK HELLMUTH, TIKAL PROJECT NEG. #65-79-19

recorded data about the Maya past, including architectural restoration, excavations, surveys, and laboratory work. Fortunately, those staff members produced an equally rich photographic record of the people involved in recovering that past during the Tikal Project — the largest-scale archaeological investigation ever undertaken in the Americas.

Several professional photographers were part of the staff in Guatemala in the early years of the project. Between 1956 and 1964, George Holton, Joya Hairs, and Walwin Barr created historic images of Tikal’s archaeological remains and of the site archaeologists, fieldworkers and their families, and visitors. Many of the 118 researchers were also skilled photographers, and they continued to photograph the work and surroundings at Tikal throughout the 1960s. Their visual contributions to the Museum’s Tikal archive are stun-

ning. Among the archaeologist-photographers who produced photographs that rivaled those of the professionals were Bill Coe, who directed the Tikal Project during its last seven years; Nick Hellmuth, who is influential in digital imaging in Maya studies today; Stuart Scott; Peter Harrison, whose photographs have traveled in museum exhibits; and Virginia Greene, now senior conservator for the Museum.

The images alone narrate a history of the Tikal Project. The photographs of people and architecture document archaeological practice, as well as the monumental scope of the project. Images of the camp reveal daily life in the Petén, which appears to be anything but routine. Beautiful portraits, intended for publicity, reflect very practical concerns with the cost of an undertaking of this scope. In all the images there is an intimacy that entices the viewer — unable to



TOP: GEORGE HOLTON. TIKAL PROJECT NEG. #57-3-44; BOTTOM: WILLIAM COE. TIKAL PROJECT NEG. #64-4-1814



TOP: Bill Coe poses with a plane-table alidade in 1957. This is obviously a publicity shot. Had Coe actually been mapping something at the time, the man holding the stadia rod in the background would have been in Coe's line of sight. Coe directed the Tikal Project from 1963 until 1970. The quality of the architectural drawings that he produced is unparalleled, and he is considered by some to be the greatest living field archaeologist in the Maya lowlands.

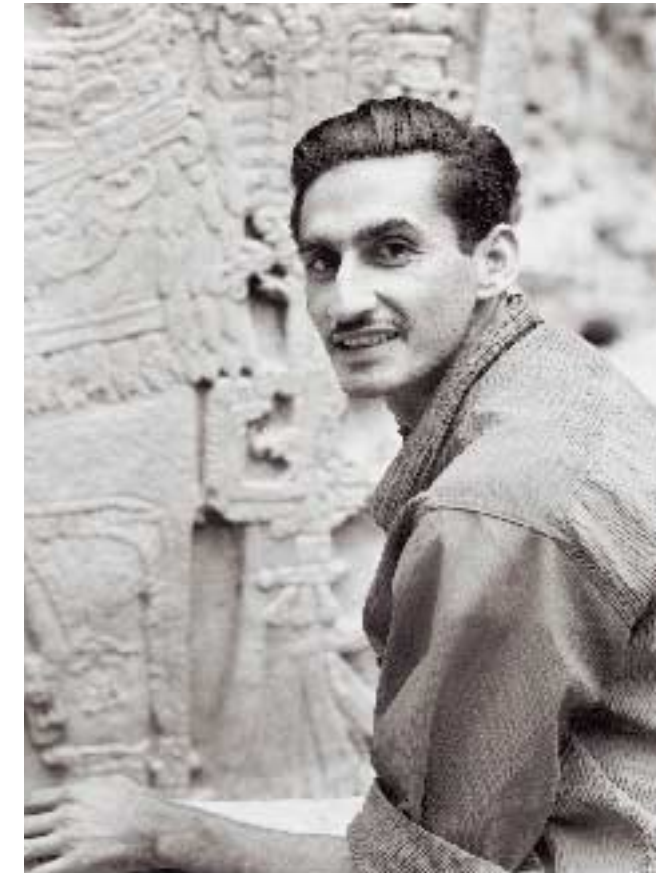
LEFT: Dennis Puleston is photographed here in 1964 with his friend Jose Santiago, the son of local workman Manuel Santiago. Puleston or "Denny," as he was known to his co-workers, was among an impressive number of North American archaeologists who had a profound impact on Maya archaeology. Some others are Peter Harrison, Chris Jones, Pat Culbert, Bill Haviland, Marshall Becker, Nick Hellmuth, and Dick Adams, to name just a few. Puleston, who directed the Settlement Survey of Tikal, died in a lightning storm at Chichen Itza. His work has had important implications for our understanding of ancient Maya settlement and environmental issues.



LEFT: GEORGE HOLTON. TIKAL PROJECT NEG. 56-3-11; RIGHT: WILLIAM R. COE. TIKAL PROJECT NEG. #60-4-18

LEFT: Labeled "Boy with Armadillo" by photographer George Holton. Shook was concerned with local workers' quality of life. He directed the building of facilities where staff could be housed with their families, provided for their medical care, built a school, and hired a teacher. A generation of children was raised at Tikal during the course of the project.

RIGHT: This 1960 picture of Antonio "Tono" Ortiz in front of Stela 22 (which he discovered) is an example of Bill Coe's gift for portraiture. A Petén native, Ortiz was chief foreman for the Tikal Project and went on to build and manage the Jungle Lodge and other facilities to accommodate the influx of tourists to Tikal. Tono still owns and manages the Jungle Lodge and lives in Flores, Guatemala. The Tikal National Park now attracts nearly half a million visitors annually.



AUTHOR BIO

Sharon Aponte Misdea is a research associate in the American Section, coordinating the Tikal Digital Access Project, and a doctoral student in the department of anthropology. She has been doing archaeological field research in the United States and Mesoamerica since 1991. In 2000, she began field research focused on clarifying the relationship between epicentral Tikal and its surrounding minor urban centers. This research in the Tikal National Park and northeastern Petén is being carried out under the direction of Dr. Vilma Fialko, a Guatemalan archaeologist with the Instituto de Antropología e Historia de Guatemala who directs the Proyecto Triángulo.





The monumentality of the archaeology at Tikal is evident in this 1957 photo of Vivian Broman Morales meticulously excavating a sherd mosaic on a floor in the Great Plaza. Broman Morales was one of a number of women who played important roles in the project from its inception, including Hattula Moholy-Nagy (laboratory director), Virginia Greene (conservator), Lisa Ferree, and Olga Puleston. Many of these women, as well as others such as Anne Chowning and Susanna Ekholm who spent a single season at Tikal, went on to prominent careers in archaeology. Bill Coe, who shot this image, was a prolific photographer. Surprisingly few images are of Coe himself. He preferred to be behind the camera and have fellow project members pose for publicity shots.

travel to Tikal in the past — to want to learn more about the individuals who were part of Tikal’s archaeological history. The 13 images here, selected from hundreds, represent the aesthetic richness preserved in the Tikal photo archive, but they only begin to touch on the story of doing archaeology at Tikal. 🏠

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to Drs. Jeremy Sabloff, Robert Sharer, and Christopher Jones for making the Tikal Digital Access Project possible. I am enormously grateful to a number of the original Tikaleños — Marshall Becker, Virginia Greene, Joya Hairs, Peter Harrison, Christopher Jones, and Hattula Moholy-Nagy — without whom, because of their dedication to Tikal and input on the content of the photos, this essay would not have been possible. Finally, many thanks to Ellen Bell, who read through several drafts of this essay, to Alex Pezzati for his assistance with research in the UPM Central Archives, and to Charles Golden and Matt Liebmann for their input on the selection of photos for inclusion here.



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