

## SUZANNE WHITELAW MILES, 1922–1966

VIVIAN BROMAN MORALES

SUZANNE WHITELAW MILES died on Easter Sunday, 1966, in Boston, Massachusetts, after a long and painful illness. Here in Guatemala the news reached us a week or so later. It was very hard to accept. We had been so hopeful of her recovery and eventual return to Guatemala and so confident that, once again, her will to do so would make this possible. Even now, more than two years later, it is difficult to realize that she is gone.

Her interests were so broad and her enthusiasm so keen that those of us who were associated with Sue in her various activities still feel that she is urging us on. Once she had made up her mind to do something, no amount of time or effort was considered too great to see it through. I realized this from first hand experience. In 1958 Sue had just finished a survey of monuments in fincas on both sides of the highway around Retalhuleu and Coatepeque in Southwestern Guatemala. Two field seasons at Tikal were behind me, and I was ready for a change. Her suggestion of a brief trip to Mexico was beguiling. We were to go to Tapachula, investigate the monuments at Izapa, then to the Chiapa de Corzo excavation near Tuxtla Gutierrez; from there we were to proceed to San Cristobal las Casas to visit the Bloms and, as a grand finale, to fly to Oaxaca to see the “danzantes” at Monte Albán. Only the mundane limits of time and money would prevent us from going further. Sue was collecting information on early sculpture, material that was later incorporated in her monograph published in the *Handbook of Middle American Research* 1966. I was along for the fun of it and for all that I could see and learn with the assistance of Sue’s penetrating and pertinent evaluation. But it was not just the pleasure of my company that prompted her suggestion of the trip. Not only did she wish for a congenial traveling companion, but she needed an archaeologist who spoke Spanish.

Before setting out on our trip, she asked that I accompany her on a visit to the Director of the Department of Roads, in case she had difficulty in explaining herself in Spanish. These offices lay across the street from the Instituto de Antropología e Historia, whose Director, don Carlos Samayoa Chinchilla, had suggested to Sue that she seek the cooperation and assistance of the

Director of the Department of Roads. Leading the way and armed with a note from Don Carlos, Sue and I were received by the Director of Public Roads. He very courteously, and with some curiosity, asked what he could do for us. At the same moment, he and I were enlightened as to the project Sue had in mind. She said that it had come to her attention, through one of the workers on a coffee finca near Retalhuleu where she was investigating the carved monuments, that the road cutting through a mound had disclosed a portion of stone with carving on it. She stated that this stone should be removed from the roadbed where it would surely be eroded, and would be damaged with the passage of time and traffic, and that it should be brought to the Museum in Guatemala City. Here the Director of Roads and I nodded in sympathetic agreement. He decided that this could easily be handled by the Department of Roads in Retalhuleu and that a note would be given to us to this effect. But how large was the monument and how many workmen would be needed to remove it? Also how much of the road would be disturbed in order to effect this? She turned to me, and, in English, begged me to back her up. By this time I was deeply but willingly involved — just as she knew I would be. She then indicated by gesture that the amount of monument showing was about the size of a salad plate, but she assured us (my face obviously registered my feelings) that the monument was sizable. To what extent, she could not say, exactly, without digging it up; she added that, of course, she and I (a qualified archaeologist presently working at Tikal) would accompany the road crew and give directions for the excavation. The Director, possibly bemused by the novelty of the request and unable to refuse two “gringas,” wrote the note for the Director of Roads in Retalhuleu and wished us luck. Since his office was so close to the museum, she assured him that in a few days he would see for himself the result of our project.

The head of the branch office in Retalhuleu, briefed by the Guatemala office and intrigued in turn, received us cordially. We duly set out with him in his jeep followed by a truck with a dozen workmen. We proceeded sedately along the road until Sue called a halt and, without the least hesitation, led us directly to the spot. A slight protuberance, about five or six inches in

diameter, with a curved line across it, was absolutely all that could be seen. It was located almost in the middle of the road. The workmen from the truck joined us and immediately set to work with picks and shovels. We cautioned them to be careful and to try not to damage the stone — to all of which they cheerfully agreed but paid little attention. There was a festival air about the occasion. The novelty of the work and the irresistible element of the unknown made the dirt fly. Seeing my concern at the care-free swings of the picks on and about the buried monument, Sue distracted me and several of the workmen, who couldn't fit in to the tight circle of excavators, to pick out sherds from the road bank. We also went into the finca with the local director of roads and saw several of the monuments there. When we returned to the road, the boulder was beginning to emerge, and the hole was rapidly encroaching on the far side of the road, making it necessary for the few cars that passed to squeeze way over onto the downslope edge. After the boulder had been cleared enough to show just what shape and size it was and when the hole was large enough, Sue got in to examine the carving. She declared it to be a "celestial frog with wings." We left the road crew hunting for poles long enough and strong enough to pry it out. To the sound of stone against stone as they threw smaller rocks into the hole for leverage, we climbed into the jeep and went on to Coatepeque — and on to Mexico.

Throughout our Mexican trip, which was wonderful and with its share of adventures, Sue would burst into laughter on thinking what Don Carlos' expression would be when the Department of Roads' truck arrived with the boulder and deposited it on the Museum's doorstep. It was there when we returned. Since then it has been given a cement pedestal and can be seen there today on the north side of the entrance to the Museum; I call it "Sue's stone" and consider it a very personal and appropriate monument to her. It measures 1.30 m. x 1.10 m. x .90 m., and its presence clearly states her motto: Never Compromise. This monument also demonstrates her ability to see things through to a successful conclusion.

Suzanne Miles' interest in anthropology, especially ethnology, physical, and social anthropology, developed at Beloit College in 1942–1943 after two years of Liberal Arts at Frances Shimer College (1940–1942). In the fall of 1943



SUZANNE WHITELAW MILES

she entered the University of Chicago and completed two years of course work under the M.A. program. During the spring and summer of the years 1946–1948, she engaged in research through interview and participant observation of voluntary rural work groups in Carroll County in northern Illinois, near her home in Mount Carroll. In 1946 there was also a short field survey of archaeological sites in Manitowoc County, Wisconsin, which accounts, I feel certain, for her long, tireless, survey stride.

In 1945, Sue went to Madison, Wisconsin, where for two years she was curator of Archaeology and Ethnology at the Wisconsin Historical Museum. In 1948 she received her M.A. degree from the University of Chicago, her thesis being "A Comparative Analysis of the Survivals of the Ancient Maya Calendar." That same year she began teaching at the University of Wisconsin as general assistant and discussion leader in Introductory Anthropology. The following year, she became an Instructor in the Anthropology and Integrated Liberal Studies depart-

ments. In addition to assisting and lecturing in General Anthropology, Social and Physical Anthropology, and Ethnology, she also assisted in lectures on Medieval Economic and Social History.

In 1950, Sue left the University of Wisconsin, and, holding the Thomas Dana Fellowship, she went to Radcliffe as a graduate student for the academic year 1950–1951. In 1952 she was named Thaw Teaching Fellow by Harvard, and in 1953 she received the Hemenway Fellowship, for the spring term. She was again given the Thaw Teaching Fellowship in 1953–1954. Sue passed her General Examinations in the Spring of 1952 and her Special Examinations in January of 1953. Her doctoral dissertation, "Sixteenth Century Social and Political Structures of the Pokom Maya," was presented in 1954, and it was published by the American Philosophical Society in 1957. Sue received her Ph.D. in 1955, in absentia. In January of 1955 she left for Guatemala and 10 months of field study in the Cuchumatán Mountains. Her work, a study of the social and political organization of the Mam, was financed by a Doherty Foundation Fellowship, a grant from the American Philosophical Society, and the United Fruit Company. This was Sue's first visit to Guatemala, and she thoroughly enjoyed living in the field and visiting various mountain villages. She spoke Mam, perhaps even better than Spanish at that point. She made a tremendous impression on everyone in the Cuchumatanes, as well as fast friendships with many Guatemalans and foreigners living in Guatemala. Returning to Cambridge in November of 1955, she applied for further aid to continue her work. In 1956 the Bollingen Foundation named her a Fellow for documentary research on the social and political systems of the Quiché and Cakchiquel groups in Guatemala. This permitted her, in 1956–1957, to return to Guatemala for six months of research in the archives in Guatemala City, with field trips to various Indian villages. (Her notebooks cover the 1955 visit to the Cuchumatanes, with a detailed daily journal. The 1958 notes are more specific to sculpture research.)

Sue continued as a Bollingen Fellow from 1956 on. In the fall of 1957 she began teaching at Brandeis University as an assistant professor in the Department of Anthropology and Social Studies. In the spring of 1958 she returned to Guatemala to make a field survey of carved monuments in the south coastal area and Kaminaljuyu. The adventure of the carved

boulder took place at this time, and she reluctantly left Guatemala to take up her teaching duties at Brandeis for the fall term. She resigned from the staff of Brandeis University at the conclusion of the academic year, 1960.

From October of 1961 until December of 1962, Sue was in Spain visiting the Archives in Madrid and other centers pursuing documentation of the 16th century as relating to New World Indian affairs, in general, and to Fray Bartolome de las Casas, in particular. She returned very enthusiastic and excited about the wealth of material available but still unknown. She came back to Guatemala in January of 1963 to continue her research on Bartolome de las Casas here and in San Cristobal, Chiapas. She was also working on the development of art styles on carved stone monuments and, naturally enough, became involved with Kaminaljuyu and salvage problems there.

Sue taught at the University of San Carlos in 1963–1964 as part of the Rockefeller Foundation program headed by Edwin Shook. For her part in that program of graduate studies, in September 1965 she was named Honorary Professor of the Facultad de Humanidades during the ceremonies marking the 20th anniversary of the founding of that Faculty. The very handsome diploma, but more especially the recognition of her efforts, pleased her greatly, and she was hopeful that the graduate studies program would grow and continue to attract and stimulate capable Guatemalans.

It was in March of 1965 that she underwent, here in Guatemala, the first of a series of treatments on her mouth and throat. Finally, in mid-June she left for Boston, where intensive and radical treatment failed to halt the spreading cancer.

For those of us here in Guatemala who knew and loved her, she remains vividly in mind, and not a day passes that one of us doesn't see or isn't reminded of something that would have pleased, amused, or infuriated her. Through the multiple projects that she left pending, we still feel her presence, and when things lag, as they are bound to, we can feel her urging us to get on with them. And so we shall, not only because of their association with her, but because in themselves they are important and Sue showed us why.

*Acknowledgment.* I have had the invaluable help of Miss Joya Hairs, a close personal friend of Dr. Miles, in preparing this tribute to her. Miss Hairs also furnished the accompanying photograph for this article.

Guatemala City  
May, 1968