

HONDURAS - A FORGOTTEN TREASURE

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COPÁN

**A PHOTOGRAPHIC INTRODUCTION TO
THE ANCIENT MAYA**

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PREFACE

This book is not meant to be a scholarly work or archaeological treatise. It is a collection of photographs intended to acquaint the reader with the beauty and ingenuity of the works of a long gone people. If there are discrepancies in dates, names or locations, please view the content for it's own beauty, not for scientific or literary review.

Also, I hope to arouse interest in a region of the Americas that has been too long ignored, a land of unparalleled tropical beauty and a people of incomparable charm.

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Countless professionals and volunteers who have worked tirelessly to piece together the gigantic puzzle that is Copán.

If you are interested in learning more about the enigma that are the Copán Ruins, I highly recommend a book by Barbara W. Fash, "The Copan Sculpture Museum, Ancient Maya Artistry in Stucco and Stone", available at Amazon Books, and well worth it's nominal investment.

Meanwhile, I hope you enjoy the photos.

Lew Marcum

INTRODUCTION



This is the Copán River, and beyond is the beautiful Copán Valley. More than two thousand years ago people migrated into the valley from the north, maybe searching for better agricultural opportunities, or perhaps to escape enemies.

In this valley they found they were kept in safety from enemies in southern Mexico by several of their related tribes who stayed behind in Guatemala. Also, to the south there were no aggressive bands within even a remote striking distance. This was a peaceful paradise of wild tropical jungle filled with fruit and game. This became the basis for the most advanced civilization in all of Pre-Columbian America.

Mayan pottery shards



There is a trail beside the Copán River, well worn by those working on reconstruction of some newly discovered sites, the occasional tourist who wishes to see some of the outlying area, and a few people who have always lived along the river. When near any of the numerous ruined building sites the observant hiker can always kick up a few shards of ancient pottery, some with original designs and paint. For me it's a thrill to touch something for the first time in certainly more than a thousand years.

Included in this photo is a chip of obsidian, purposely shaped with a square razor-sharp edge. These were embedded into the wooden swords of the Mayan warriors as a cutting edge, because they never learned to work metal sufficiently to make weapons. As an amateur "treasure hunter" and historian this stone chip is one of my most prized finds.

MACAWS

The red, yellow and blue Macaw was one of the most sacred symbols of the Classic Maya of Copán. It was believed to be a direct emissary of the sun, and held a status nearly that of a god. Statues and carvings are everywhere in their honor.









Though the Macaw was revered almost as a god, the Green Loro was also held in high esteem. Both these species can mimic human speech.





MAYA: MASTER STONE WORKERS

The Maya of Copán were fortunate to have a ready supply of easily-worked volcanic tuff, with which they could shape into building blocks, and even works of art. Even with primitive tools they were able to do magnificent stone masonry.



A partial view of the Acropolis

A small pyramid known simply as "Structure #4"



The Maya are famous for their building construction. Most are in the same general style, with a sturdy stone base and steps up into a pyramidal shape. They learned early on that this was a very stable form of construction.

Another small partially reconstructed pyramid in the Main Plaza area.



There are many such structures all over the Copán River valley in various states of reconstruction.

One side of the famous Ball Court.



Along with the stelae, the Ball Court is the most famous, and most visited structure in all the Copán complex. Many thousands of photos have been taken of this beautiful structure, yet it never ceases to amaze.

The central playing area of the Ball Court.



The Ball Court is a beautiful structure with a morbid past. The Ancient Mayas took the ball game very seriously. Many people lost all their worldly possessions, had their families sold into slavery, and many even lost their lives on the outcome of a game. After a game, occasionally some losing players were sacrificed on the nearby alters.

Each side of the Ball Court had three goal markers, in the shape of Macaw heads. This was the original style of marker, unlike the later ring markers at Yucatán. Though the rules of the game are not known, it was most certainly a violent and serious affair.



One of the original Macaw head markers at Copán.

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