



The Hieroglyphic Stairway of Copán, Honduras

Study Results and Conservation Proposals

A PROJECT REPORT

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The Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles

Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia, Tegucigalpa

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The Getty Conservation Institute works internationally to advance the field of conservation through scientific research, field projects, education and training, and the dissemination of information in various media. In its programs, the GCI focuses on the creation and delivery of knowledge that will benefit the professionals and organizations responsible for the conservation of the visual arts.

The Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia (IHAH) is an autonomous agency of the Honduran state charged with protecting, conserving, and researching the cultural heritage of Honduras. IHAH promotes and publicizes, both nationally and internationally, Honduras's cultural heritage—the tangible and intangible products of its ancestors and contemporaries that fulfill a formative and informative function for the country's current generations. IHAH provides information and scholarship on the development, adaptation, creativity, social organization, and global view of different human groups and their environment, while also promoting Honduran national identity.

Front cover photo by Eliud Guerra, September 2006.

Back cover photo courtesy of Hiroyuki Ikarashi, July 2003.

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Preface

This conservation project of the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) and the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia (IHAH) of Honduras has various roots, some of which go back to 1986, when the Hieroglyphic Stairway Project began. Two years later it became incorporated into the Proyecto Arqueológico Acrópolis de Copán (PAAC), an eight-year project led by William Fash of Harvard University and administered through IHAH. The aim of the Hieroglyphic Stairway Project was to investigate, stabilize, and restore this important feature of Copán Structure 26 (W. Fash et al. 1992, 105–6).

In July 1997, a meeting of experts was called by IHAH and UNESCO at the site of Copán to address the deterioration of the Hieroglyphic Stairway and the possible dismantling and removal of the Stairway blocks to a more controlled environment. A panel of archaeologists, conservators, and scientists with extensive experience at the site or in the conservation field discussed the condition of the Hieroglyphic Stairway and the different options to promote its conservation. The discussion, based on previous reports, led to the key recommendation to conduct an assessment of the stone's condition that would include detailed archival research, characterization of the Stairway stone, and environmental monitoring. Proposals for the conservation of the Stairway would then be formulated based on an analysis of these study results (IHAH 1997).

Before and after this meeting, a series of regional meetings was convened by various institutions, including the Getty Conservation Institute. Representatives of cultural heritage governmental institutions in the Maya region, as well as representatives of international agencies, were brought together to discuss the most important conservation needs of the region. In this context, a joint project of IHAH and the GCI was initiated in 1999, with the aim to establish a long-term conservation strategy for the Hieroglyphic Stairway that could be beneficial to the conservation field in general and a useful reference for similar studies elsewhere at the site and in the Maya region.

The project was carried out by a team of GCI staff and consultants, initially in collaboration with Barbara Fash, Director of IHAH's Hieroglyphic Stairway Conservation project, from 1999 to 2002 (Andrews and Fash 2005, 25). The project

consisted of a series of study field campaigns in Copán, environmental monitoring, laboratory testing and analysis in the GCI scientific laboratories, and archival research in the United States and in IHAH archives in Tegucigalpa and Copán. As much as possible, IHAH staff was involved in the field campaigns in order to increase their understanding of the conservation process and to train them in its various activities, from condition recording to treatment trials. The intended result was that IHAH would thereby become more capable of addressing its conservation challenges in the future.

The preliminary phase of the project included the selection of the condition recording methodology for the Stairway, initial sampling of Copán stone for laboratory analysis, and collection of basic environmental conditions at the Stairway. A complete stereophotographic survey of the carved Stairway surfaces was undertaken. The documentation methods and tools were selected with reference to the current capacities of IHAH to undertake similar work on its own.

In September 2000, a meeting was organized by the GCI at Copán to evaluate the results of the preliminary studies, further define the needed outcomes of the scientific research and environmental monitoring, and develop preliminary observations and recommendations regarding the future conservation and maintenance of the Stairway (Getty Conservation Institute 2000b).

The following report documents the results of the studies and analysis that have taken place since the beginning of the project, including the principal findings of the conservation history of the Stairway and the assessment of current conditions. On the basis of these findings and the results of trial treatments carried out since 2001 on the Stairway, options for conservation actions are proposed, and recommendations for future condition monitoring and long-term maintenance are presented.

Acknowledgments

This report presents the findings and recommended actions for the conservation of the Hieroglyphic Stairway at Copán. The project is part of the Maya Initiative, an effort of the Field Projects group of the Getty Conservation Institute, and has been carried out in collaboration with the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia (IHAH) of Honduras. The Getty Conservation Institute would like to acknowledge the support and collaboration of IHAH, currently directed by Dr. Dario A. Euraque, and formerly by Dr. Ricardo Agurcia Fasquelle, Ambassador Margarita Durón de Gálvez, Arq. Gilberto Lagos, and Dra. Olga Joya, as well as former acting director and Head of the Department of Anthropological Research for IHAH, Lic. Carmen Julia Fajardo. Past and present Heads of Conservation, Arq. Ana María Escher and Ing. Rolando Soto, have also provided assistance to the project. In particular, the GCI would like to express its gratitude to Professor Oscar Cruz Melgar, Regional Director of IHAH, and to all of his staff at the site of Copán, especially José Rufino Membreño and Rolando Marroquín, for their generous assistance. We would also like to acknowledge the logistical assistance provided by Alberto Durón, IHAH, in La Lima and Armando Ortiz in El Puente. To the staff at the Centro Regional de Investigaciones Arqueológicas (CRIA) in Copán, in particular Laura Nina Flores, Librarian, we express our gratitude for their research and data communication assistance. The members of IHAH's Programa Integral de Conservación del Parque Arqueológico de Copán (PICPAC) project, directed by Dr. Seiichi Nakamura and later by Dr. Ricardo Agurcia Fasquelle, have also provided valuable assistance—in particular, photographer Hiroyuki Ikarashi and Ing. Iroshka Enamorado.

The initial phase of the project was undertaken with the assistance of Barbara Fash, Research Associate, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, and Director of IHAH's Hieroglyphic Stairway Conservation Project. We would like to express our sincere thanks to her and to the members of her project. The drawing of the Stairway reproduced in the report is adapted from her unpublished drawing, which she kindly shared with the project. In addition, Eliud Guerra provided important assistance with both documentation and treatment trial activities throughout the project.

Photographer Reyna Flores provided valuable photographic documentation and development work. Concepción Lázaro and Ana Edith Lara also assisted the project with their documentation work. Juan Ramón Guerra, driver, provided logistical assistance at the beginning of the project, and Fernando López contributed in various ways, including constructing the access stairs and steps to the Stairway.

To the staff of the Asociación Copán and Catherine Doctor, we express our gratitude for their keen interest in the project, the site of Copán, and its interpretation. We would also like to thank Eduardo Góchez of Concultura of El Salvador, who provided assistance with the installation of the environmental monitoring stations.

The archival research of the project in the United States has benefited from the assistance of the staff of the Archives of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, in particular India Spartz. In addition, we would like to acknowledge the assistance of Mara Yarbrough, librarian of the Library of the Laboratory of Anthropology, Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

The GCI Hieroglyphic Stairway Conservation Project has been carried out under the general coordination of Institute Director Tim Whalen, Associate Director Jeanne Marie Teutonico, Head of Field Projects François LeBlanc, and Head of the Maya Initiative Françoise Descamps. Numerous GCI staff, both past and present, have contributed to the project at various times and to different extents: from the Field Projects group, Elsa Bourguignon, Jennifer Carballo, Rand Eppich, Evin Erder, Christopher Gray, Virginia Horton, Bettina Lucherini, Rick Miller, Thomas Roby, Giora Solar, Lucia Valero-Martin, and Anna Zagorski; from the Science group, Susan Baron, Vincent Beltran, Ann Bourges, David Carson, Giacomo Chiari, Alberto de Tagle, Eric Doehne, Pnina Evans, Joy Mazurek, Herant Khanjian, Tiziana Lombardo, Shin Maekawa, Urs Mueller, Alice Ormsbee, Carlos Rodriguez Navarro, and Stefan Simon; from the Dissemination and Research Resources group, Angela Escobar, Jane Fujimoto, and Tom Shreves; and from the J. Paul Getty Museum, Eduardo Sanchez.

The GCI would like to acknowledge the assistance of consultant William Martin, architectural conservator and stone

conservation expert, who provided valuable guidance throughout the project. Other consultants provided contributions at different stages: Clive Boardman, stereophotography; Peter Boniface, survey data analysis; Paul Brooks, stereophotography; Giulia Caneva, biological analysis; Catherine Dewey, graphic documentation; Mark Gemperline, structural engineering; Lorenzo Lazzarini, geologist and stone conservation expert; Lorraine McVey, bibliographic research; Mark Philips, survey data analysis; Gionata Rizzi, conservation architect and shelter design; Todd Rutenbeck, structural engineering; Luis Torres Montes, chemist and stone conservation expert; Fritz Wenzel, structural engineering; and Albert Wiedmann, survey data analysis. Jefferson Consulting and Sandberg Engineers provided assistance with materials analysis.

Executive Summary

The Hieroglyphic Stairway is one of the principal reasons that the Maya archaeological site of Copán in Honduras is considered to be of outstanding universal significance, and it was therefore designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1980. The Stairway, located on the west side of the temple-pyramid Structure 26, has the longest known Maya text inscription from ancient Mesoamerica, dating from the eighth century CE. The inscription tells the official history of Copán's rulers and, as such, is of exceptional historic significance. The Hieroglyphic Stairway was excavated in the late 1890s and was reconstructed in the late 1930s and 1940s. Since then, the Stairway has become an important national and cultural symbol and a source of pride for Honduran society.

In recent decades, concerns about the deterioration and loss of carved stone surfaces at the site—in particular the hieroglyphic inscription—have led to scientific studies of the stone and to international meetings of archaeology and conservation experts to determine the best approach to the conservation of Copán's monuments. Since 1979, surface treatments of the stone have been done, first to remove microbiological growth. Later, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, surface consolidation was undertaken. To prevent deterioration, other measures have also been taken, including preventing visitors from walking on the Stairway, and, in 1985, constructing a protective shelter. Despite these efforts to prevent further loss of carved surfaces in situ, consideration was also given to the possibility of removing the Stairway blocks to a more controlled environment. In 1999 the Getty Conservation Institute and the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia (IHAIH) agreed to pursue a collaborative project to analyze conditions of the Stairway and to determine the actions to be taken for its future conservation.

This report provides a summary of the in-depth and comprehensive study of the Hieroglyphic Stairway, consisting of historical research, scientific studies on the stone and mortar materials and on the biological colonization of the Stairway, a detailed condition survey, and monitoring of the Stairway environment. Based on an analysis of the gathered and integrated information, proposals and options for the future conservation of the Stairway are given. Although significant

stone deterioration has taken place since the Hieroglyphic Stairway was excavated, most areas of the monument are currently in stable condition, with few, localized exceptions. The stability of the stone at present is largely due to the protective shelter, which keeps the stone surfaces dry, reduces the daily environmental variations the Stairway would otherwise be subjected to, and drastically limits microbiological growth on the stone. Current conditions can and should be maintained by continuing the use of a protective shelter—either the present system, with some limited and localized modifications, or a new, permanent shelter that will maintain the current microenvironment. Direct access to the Stairway should be limited as much as possible, because even occasional authorized access continues to be a cause of limited loss of surface stone. With these two preventive conservation measures in place, the conservation of the monument can be ensured for the future without the need for removing the blocks to a more controlled environment.

Conservation treatments could significantly improve the condition of the Stairway by repointing—filling current areas of loss in the mortar surrounding the blocks—and by stabilizing the carved surface areas in danger of loss. Both of these treatments, repointing and surface stabilization, can be effectively done with the use of locally available materials for making the lime mortars, but they should be done by trained personnel who are also able to document their work. Alternatively, a decision could be made to go beyond the minimum intervention needed for stabilization and to improve the overall presentation of the Stairway and the reading of the hieroglyphs by carrying out a complete conservation treatment. Such a project would entail removing existing mortar between blocks and repointing the entire Stairway, as well as reducing or removing previous surface treatments and replacing them as needed. This high level of treatment could make the carved blocks more visible and legible. With skillful treatments, the blocks will be more homogeneous in appearance, and the repairs will thereby be less evident than they are at present.

Regardless of the level of treatment carried out in the near future, it will be necessary to monitor and maintain the condition of the Stairway as well as the treatments, to ensure

that they function properly in the future and that additional deterioration or loss is prevented. A program of photographic monitoring and visual inspection is proposed, to be carried out by a group of trained maintenance personnel dedicated to the Hieroglyphic Stairway and all monuments at the site. The maintenance team should be supervised by a trained conservator, who can guarantee that the work is properly organized, carried out, and documented. In order to begin and sustain this activity, potential conservators and maintenance technicians should be identified and trained to carry out these year-round functions on site. Because the training process lasts years for conservators and many months for technicians, the need for training should be addressed by IHAH as soon as possible, in order to improve the conservation and management of the site in the near future.

Although this study has focused on the conservation of one architectural element of the site of Copán, there are aspects of the study that could be applied to the conservation of other monuments and to the benefit of the entire site. For example, the methodology proposed for monitoring the condition of the Stairway can be utilized throughout the site. The treatment methodology proposed in the report could be applicable to other sheltered monuments at Copán. In addition, the overall project methodology—condition assessment, analysis of findings, proposals and testing of treatments and preventive measures, then planning for the intervention—is applicable to other monuments, regardless of the level of available funding.

Introduction

Description of the Archaeological Site of Copán

The archaeological site of Copán is located in western Honduras, near the borders with Guatemala and El Salvador, approximately five hundred kilometers northwest of the capital Tegucigalpa. It is part of the Municipality of Copán Ruinas, of the Department of Copán (Fig. 1). During the Classic Maya period (250–900 CE), Copán was situated on the southeastern

boundary of the Maya Lowlands, a cultural region now encompassed by the modern states of Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador (Fig. 2) (W. Fash 1991; Webster 1999, 1). Copán, one of the largest and best-known centers, was one of the dominating polities in the region, a fact that its monumental ruins attest to today. Covering approximately twelve hectares, the central area of the site, called the Principal Group or Main Group, is made up of a series of large buildings organized around open plazas. The Principal Group is divided into two sections: the northern lower plazas and the



Figure 1 Map of Honduras.

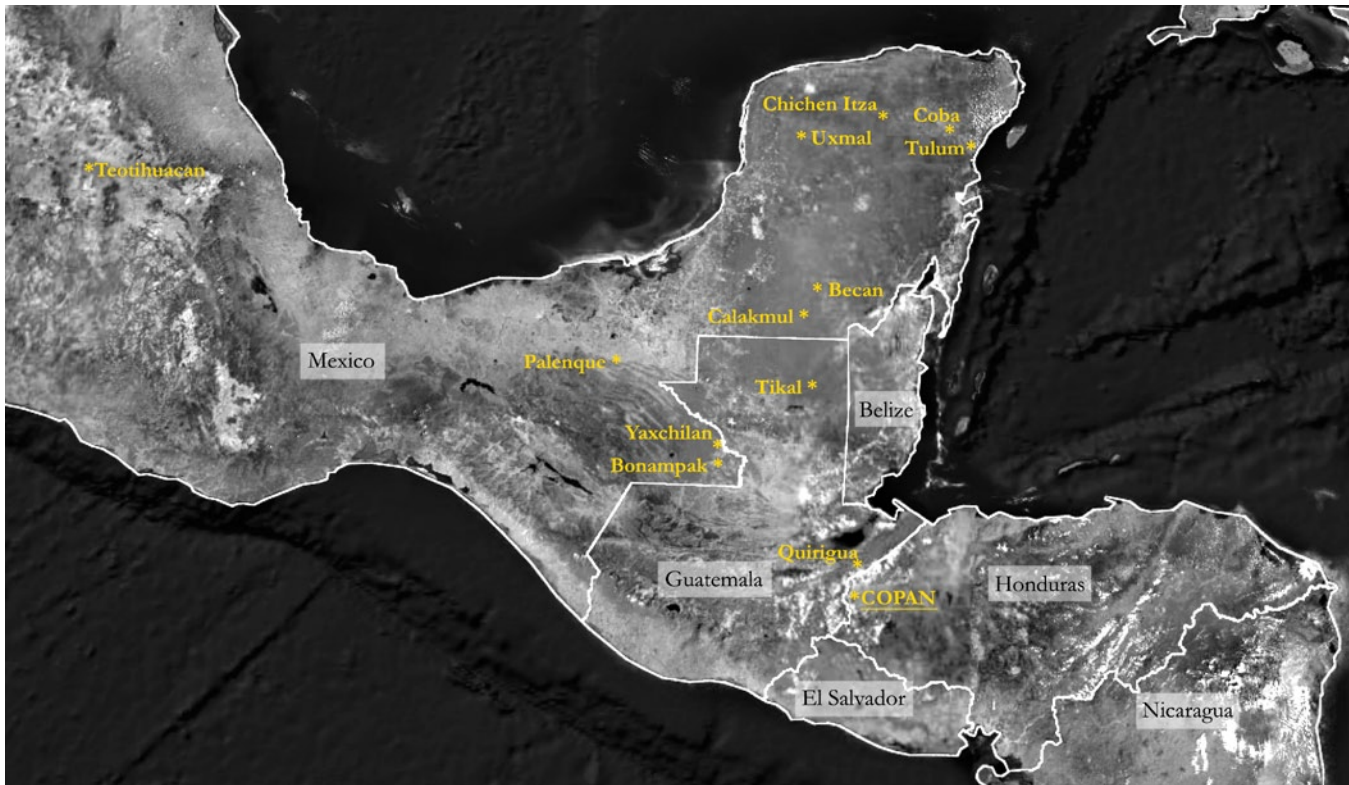


Figure 2 Map of Mesoamerica showing the most important Maya sites.

southern acropolis, an elevated area that is the result of the buildup of centuries of sequential construction (**Fig. 5**) (W. Fash 1991, 21).

In the largest lower plaza, or Great Plaza, we find carved stelae and altars commissioned by Copán's thirteenth ruler (**Fig. 4**). The Court of the Hieroglyphic Stairway is located just south of this area, along with the Ballcourt and Temple 11 (or Temple of the Inscriptions). To the south, the acropolis is organized into two main courtyards. The West Court is bordered on the east by Structure 16, inside which the well-preserved, painted Rosalila Temple was discovered through tunnel excavations (a full-scale replica of it is now displayed at the site's Sculpture Museum) (Agurcia Fasquelle 1996). The important Altar Q, which depicts the sixteen Copán kings and links the sixteenth ruler to the dynasty's founding ruler, is also located in the Plaza of the West Court. The East Court (or Jaguar Plaza) has a variety of buildings, including Temple 22 and the adjacent Mat House, or Community House, where the fourteenth king would meet with representatives of the people (**Fig. 5**) (B. Fash et al. 1992). To the south of the acropolis, numerous elite residential compounds have been found (W. Fash 1991, 26).

Located in a narrow river valley with pockets of rich alluvial soil, Copán was well suited to the cultivation of Mesoamerican food staples like corn and beans, as well as tobacco and cacao (**Fig. 6**) (Webster 1999, 6; Schumann de Baudez 1985). The Principal Group did not exist in isolation, as the Copán Valley contains thousands of archaeological remains. The settlement survey conducted by Harvard University

beginning in the mid-1970s produced detailed settlement maps of the area and documented the ancient use of the land (W. Fash 1991, 27). Excavations at several areas outside of Copán's main civic-ceremonial center have yielded further data on the ancient Maya polity (**Fig. 7**) (see, for example, Webster 1989).

Ancient History of the Site and the Hieroglyphic Stairway

The archaeological history of Copán begins with the initial occupation of the Copán Valley by farmers living in small settled villages around 1400 BCE. Evidence for the development of complex organization in the Copán area by about 1000–850 BCE has been found at a residential area east of the Principal Group (Las Sepulturas), where burials and associated grave goods with Olmec imagery have been uncovered (W. Fash 1991, 65–64, 70).

The Early Classic period at Copán (400–600 CE) is the first time that one begins to see significant changes in Copán society, including an increase in population and the appearance of the Classic Maya cultural characteristics. These include the Classic Maya hieroglyphic writing system, their elaborate calendrical system, temple and palace constructions with stone masonry and vaulted rooms, architectural layouts focused on a central plaza, ballcourts, polychrome pottery, and sophisticated art style (Coe 1995, 47; Bell et al. 2004). By the end of the Early Classic, researchers estimate that about eight to twelve

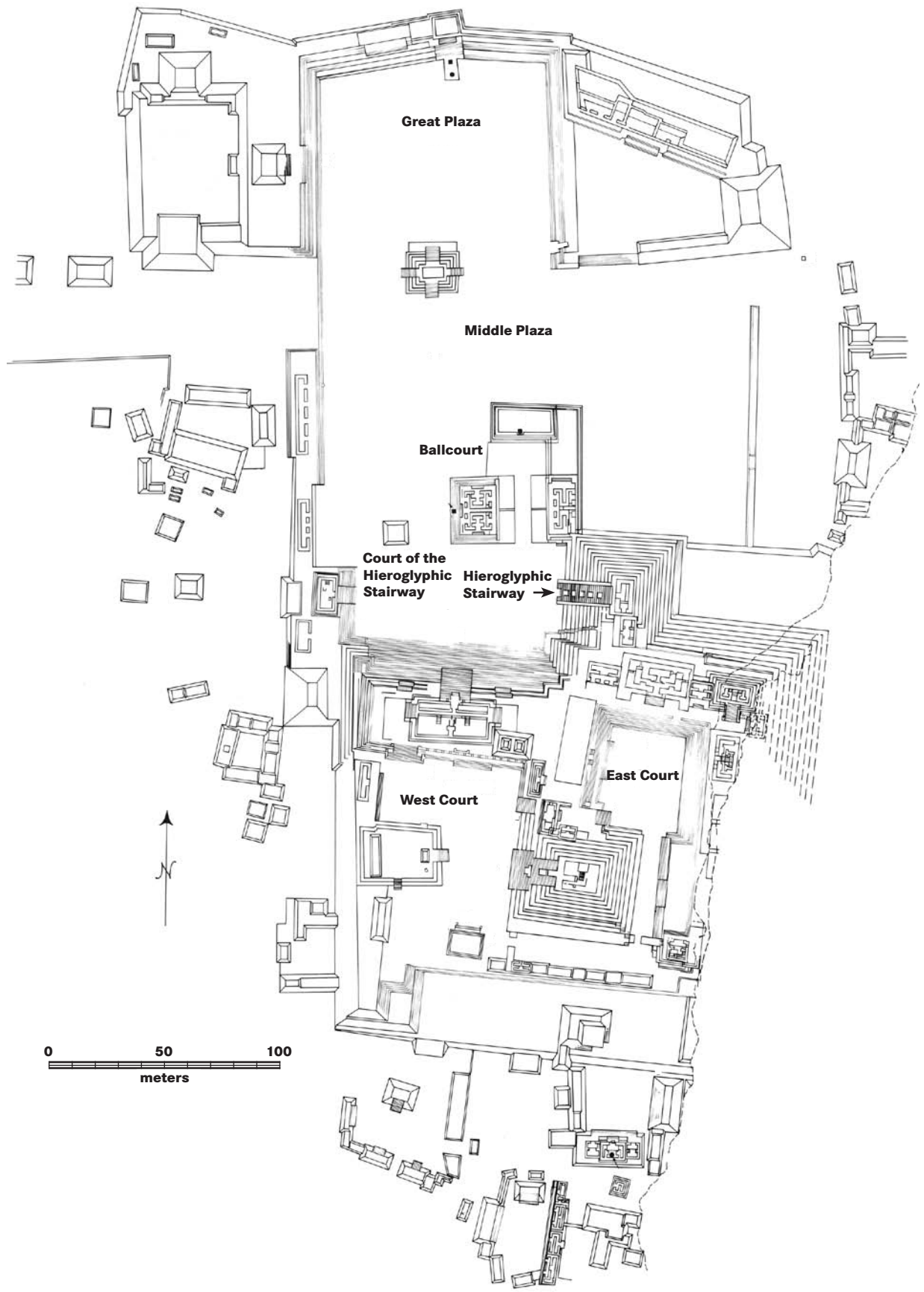


Figure 3 Map of the Principal Group of Copán.



Figure 4 The Great Plaza, looking northeast, with Structure 4, stelae, and altars in the background.



Figure 5 The East Court, or Jaguar Plaza, looking northwest, showing Temple 22 with shelter in the background.



Figure 6 The Copán Valley looking northwest. The Principal Group is in the forested area, the Copán River is in the foreground, and the modern village of Copán Ruinas is in the left background.

thousand people were living in the Copán pocket (W. Fash 1991, 76). Inscriptions document that in 426 CE, K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo' established Copán's ruling dynasty (Stuart 1992), and all subsequent rulers trace their kingship to him. The Copán dynasty recorded a total of sixteen rulers; the monuments and constructions of the last rulers of Copán during the Late Classic period (600–900 CE) are visible in the Principal Group today.

During the latter part of the Classic period, many Maya centers first became increasingly complex—both sociopolitically and economically—and then declined. Although the causes of this collapse are still a matter of debate, many researchers have cited internal problems, including ecological factors (W. Fash 1991, 173). At Copán's height, around 800 CE, it is estimated that twenty thousand inhabitants lived in the Copán pocket (W. Fash 1991, 154), yet after the death of its sixteenth ruler in 820 the policy suffered a collapse and was for the most part abandoned until the appearance of culturally different groups in the mid-tenth century (Manahan 2004).

Although the Hieroglyphic Stairway was reconstructed during the first half of the twentieth century, little was previously understood about the history of this monument, other than the clues provided by the ancient dates recorded in the Stairway's inscriptions. Epigraphers noted that twenty years had passed between the date of the dedication of the Stairway and the last date recorded for the thirteenth ruler of Copán; also, other inscriptions recorded the decapitation of this ruler by the ruler of Quiriguá in 738 (W. Fash 2002, 9; W. Fash et al. 1992, 106). Yet it was not until 1986, with the beginning of the Hieroglyphic Stairway Project, that researchers undertook archaeological investigations to understand the meaning and motivations behind this important monument (**Fig. 8**) (W. Fash 2002, 9).

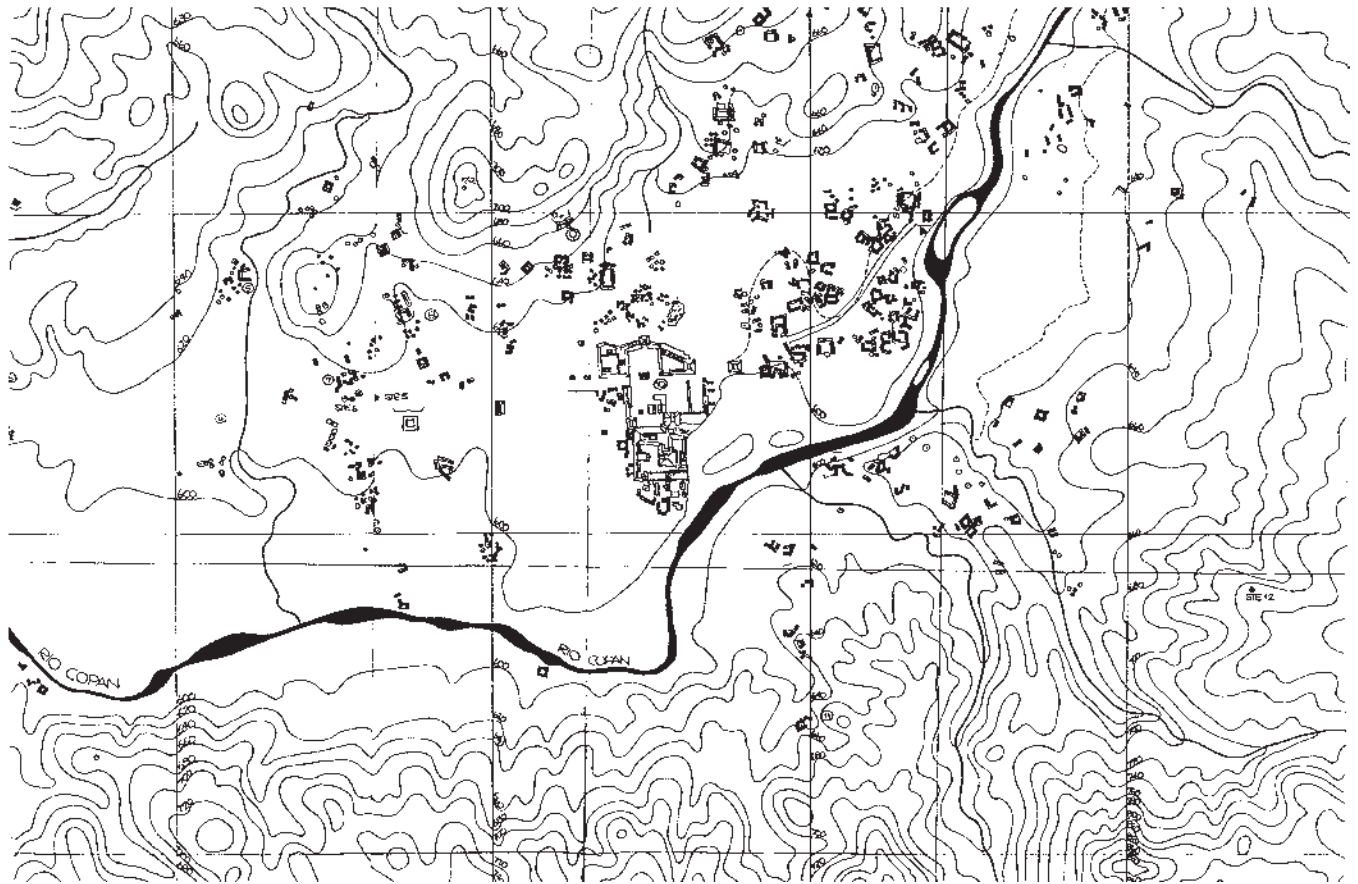


Figure 7 Map of the settlement surrounding ancient Copán, centered on the Principal Group.



Figure 8 Court of the Hieroglyphic Stairway looking southeast, with Structure 26 and the Stairway, temporarily without its shelter, on the left. July 2003.

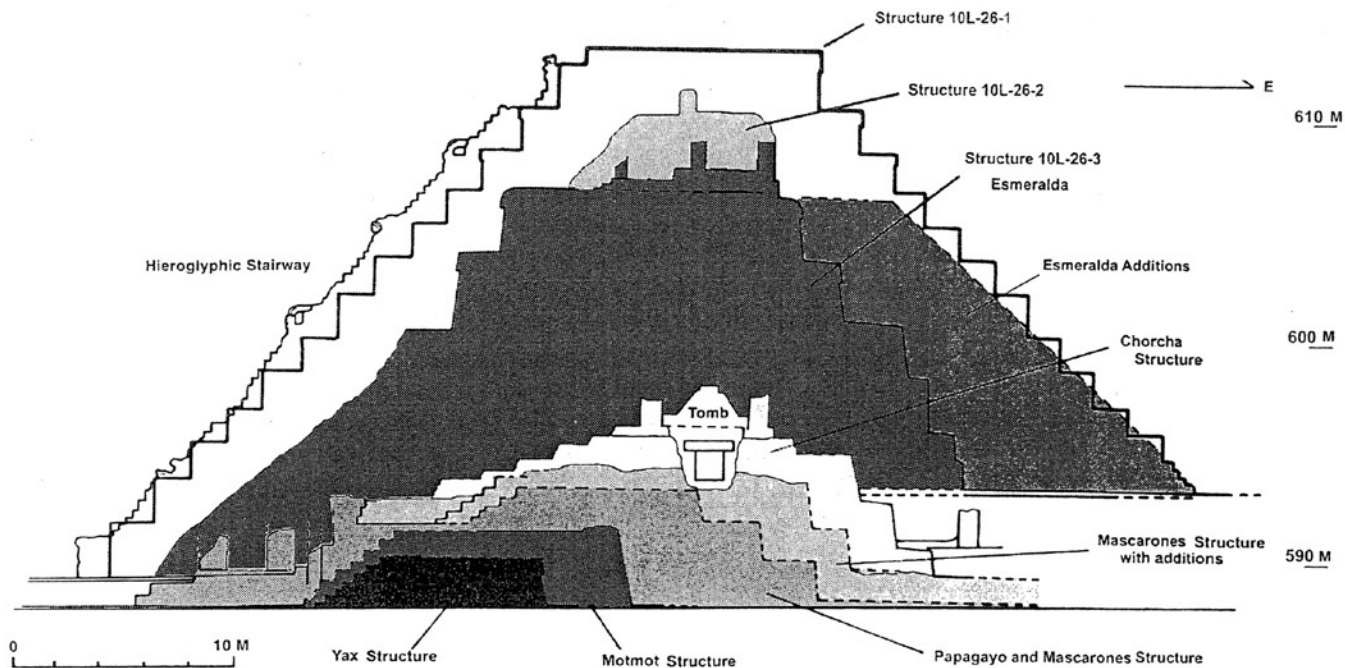


Figure 9 Schematic cross section of the major structures uncovered in the investigation of Structure 26, based on features exposed through the excavation of various modern tunnels.

In particular, two competing hypotheses concerning the Stairway were tested. One was that the Hieroglyphic Stairway was a conquest monument, constructed by the ruler of nearby Quiriguá to celebrate its victory against Copán. A second hypothesis was that the Stairway was a “great revivalist temple” constructed by the fifteenth ruler of Copán to relegitimize dynastic rule after the defeat of the thirteenth ruler by Quiriguá. By tunneling into the temple-pyramid structure (Structure 26) of the Hieroglyphic Stairway and investigating earlier versions of the structure, archaeologists were able to “test the history of the stairway” (W. Fash et al. 1992, 107; W. Fash 2002, 10).

William Fash and his team uncovered a wealth of archaeological evidence providing support for the second of these two hypotheses, while also contributing to our understanding of the early dynastic history of Copán. Excavations revealed that K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo', the founder of the Copán dynasty, built the two earliest constructions at this location in the early fifth century CE. Ruler 2 then built a structure over these buildings—called Papagayo by the archaeologists who uncovered it—that was left intact for the next 250 years (W. Fash 2002, 10, 11). It was not until after the death of Ruler 12, in 695, that a new structure was constructed at this location. Ruler 15 created a tomb chamber for Ruler 12 on top of Papagayo, then covered it with a huge temple-pyramid. Researchers believe that on the broad steps on the eastern side of this building (a change from the earlier structures at this location, which had westward-facing stairways), the first hieroglyphic stairway was dedicated fifteen years after the death of Ruler 12 (**Fig. 9**).

The inscriptions on this earlier stairway tell the story of Ruler 12, who ruled Copán for more than sixty years. Then, in 758, Copán's thirteenth ruler, who commissioned many

of the beautiful monuments we now see at the site today, was killed in battle against Quiriguá, and the short rule of the subsequent ruler, Ruler 14, may have incorporated a more “consensual government,” as suggested by the construction of the Mat House (W. Fash 2002, 15; B. Fash et al. 1992). The Hieroglyphic Stairway one sees today was constructed on the west side of the temple-pyramid by Ruler 15, who built a more elaborate version of the original hieroglyphic stairway (**Fig. 10**). After removing the carved blocks of Ruler 13's hieroglyphic stairway from the eastern side of the building, Ruler 15 created a new, larger pyramid in the form of thirteen terraces, symbolizing the thirteen levels of heaven in the Mesoamerican worldview (W. Fash 2002, 16). The inscriptions of the Hieroglyphic Stairway refer to many events throughout the history of the Copán dynasty, emphasizing its divine origins and relegitimizing its right to rule, after the unfortunate demise of its thirteenth ruler (**Fig. 11**).

Significance of the Hieroglyphic Stairway

Copán is one of the largest and best-researched sites in the Maya area, which has produced more hieroglyphic inscriptions and sculpted monuments than any other archaeological site in the New World (**Fig. 12**) (W. Fash 1991, 19). Its diverse corpus of ancient sculpture, strikingly beautiful and expressive, makes the site “potentially a marvelous window onto ancient Maya ideology” (W. Fash 2002, 7). For these archaeological reasons, and because the architectural complex of Copán, with its pyramidal temples and plazas, is among the most characteristic of Mayan civilization, Copán satisfies UNESCO's World Heritage



Figure 10 The Hieroglyphic Stairway during the temporary removal of its shelter. July 2003.



Figure 11 Drawing of glyphs of blocks 406 to 410, step 45.



Figure 12 Detail of the Hieroglyphic Stairway showing block 565 (glyph B), step 39.

Convention criteria for outstanding universal significance (Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Honduras 1979). As a result, Copán has been a World Heritage Site since 1980. In its recommendation to UNESCO, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) specifically cited the hieroglyphic inscription of the Stairway of Structure 26 as being of considerable historic significance (ICOMOS 1980).

Situated on the west side of this temple pyramid, the Hieroglyphic Stairway—which was built in two parts at two different times (710 and 755 CE)—has the longest known Maya text inscription from ancient Mesoamerica (**Fig. 15**) (W. Fash 2002, 7). The inscription tells the official history of Copán’s rulers and provides “an accurate record of previous dynastic events and personages of importance” (W. Fash et al. 1992, 112). In the New World, where preserved historical records documenting the events and individuals of the past are few, the Stairway also provides the rare opportunity to compare the history told by the sculpted texts to the data uncovered by archaeological research. The Hieroglyphic Stairway has allowed modern researchers to develop their understanding of the transformation of Copán’s politico-religious ideology (see W. Fash 2002, 15).

Although most of the Stairway was reconstructed in the late 1930s—during which process more than half of the carved blocks were not put back into their original positions—the bottom fifteen steps were found, and remain, in situ. Despite the inaccuracies in its reconstruction, the Stairway has become an important national symbol and a source of pride for Honduran society, playing a vital role in strengthening cultural identity. Evidence of the monument’s political and cultural importance is the depiction of the Stairway, together with the Ballcourt, on the country’s most common banknote (**Fig. 14**), as well as the use of the Stairway Court for a recent Honduran presidential inauguration. The Stairway is one of the reasons that Copán is the leading cultural site in the country for tourism, both international and national, and it forms an important part of the national education curriculum.



Figure 13 Steps 39 to 44 on the north side of the Hieroglyphic Stairway.



Figure 14 Honduran one-lempira note, showing the Hieroglyphic Stairway (right) and the Ballcourt of Copán (center).

