

The Future of the Maya Past: The Convergence of Conservation and Investigation

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LA ASOCIACION DE ESTUDIOS PRECOLOMBINOS COPÁN

Archaeology likes to think of itself as a predictive science, whose broad anthropological perspectives enable its practitioners not only to describe and explain the past, but to predict human reactions and adaptations to a given set of ecological and social conditions. We do not claim to have a crystal ball, and we are hardly alone in seeing the future of the Maya past with concern. All of you have seen the scars being cut on the modern Mesoamerican landscape by many of the same forces that devastated this part of the world over a thousand years ago, forces that if not checked will result in ecological disaster on a wide regional basis. Likewise, all of you have in some form or another had to confront the issue of archaeological specimens that were obtained in illegal excavations, and have come to realize the damage that is wrought upon the cultural landscape by the continued and in some places accelerated destruction of Maya archaeological sites by looters. No doubt more than a few of you, especially the veterans of the earliest Mesas Redondas, will lament the way the Maya area and Palenque in particular have changed, with all the infrastructure and modernization brought about by the touristic commercialization of Maya culture. Finally, we are all, I trust, extremely hopeful and excited by the possibility that the Maya people are organizing themselves, and will have a role in the decision-making process about the future of the living as well as the ancient Maya.

In addressing the issue of the future of the Maya past here, we share some of the perspectives on conservation and investigation derived from nearly two decades of sustained research at the ruins of Copán by all four authors, and an equivalent span of time at Tikal in the case of Rudy Larios. We do this not to claim that ours has been the ideal situation or set of solutions, but rather as a

means of sharing our concerns about the destiny of the Maya legacy, and to offer some concrete suggestions as to how those concerns can be constructively addressed. We also want to hear from those of you who are tackling the same issues elsewhere, and we want to do what we can to collaborate and exchange ideas and information on these problems.

Our central thesis is that archaeologists must change the way in which they think about working in the Maya area, and put the conservation of the archaeological, biotic, and modern cultural resources as their first goal, and as the frame within which they construct their research designs. In our view, the days are gone when an archaeologist, or any anthropologist, can sit in their ivory tower and plan fieldwork that will solve issues and research questions that are purely of theoretical or intellectual interest. Given the quickly accelerating changes being wrought upon the physical and social landscape in the closing years of this millennium, social scientists in general and archaeologists in particular need to focus their attention and their efforts on work that is dedicated to saving the past for the future. While many of you will disagree and most will immediately think that pure research will suffer as a result, we have concrete evidence to the contrary. Our experiences in the Copán Valley, as we hope to illustrate here, show that quality conservation demands first-rate research, and that research is in turn greatly illuminated by the conservation work itself. Thus, our second thesis is that when one follows this “convergent” approach, it is in fact a “win-win” situation, and the tradeoffs are minimal compared with the benefits.

Archaeological and conservation work in Copán

The modern era of archaeological research in Copán commenced in 1975, when Gordon Willey was summoned to Copán by the Instituto

Hondureño de Antropología e Historia (IHAH) to design a long-term program of archaeological research and exploration. The Government of Honduras was interested in developing Copán as a tourist attraction, but to its credit made sure that proper scientific investigation preceded, and would establish the guidelines for, that development. Wiley brought in his colleagues from the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania, Robert Sharer and William Coe, then working on the nearby site of Quiriguá, Guatemala, to help in the formulation of that long-term research design. The plan they arrived at and published in the IHAH's journal *Yaxkin* (Wiley, Coe, and Sharer 1975) called for the following: mapping of all archaeological remains in the Copán Valley, as far distant from the site center as Rio Amarillo; selected excavations of the sites in the valley, as a means of answering questions about the structure and growth of ancient Maya society there; the investigation and consolidation of the archaeological cut of the Copán Acropolis, with tunnels to be cut perpendicular to the face of the cut as a means of better understanding and evaluating the features exposed by the Copán River; an evaluation of the physical setting of the Copán Valley, and the changes it underwent during and after the Classic period apogee of the city, to be carried out by a team of cultural geographers and allied specialists; and further work to be carried out in the site core or Principal Group, including the investigation of some major buildings and a detailed study of the monumental sculpture that had focused international attention on Copán in the first place.

All of these activities have been carried out, and many more besides, over the course of the 19 years that followed the publication of Willey, Coe, and Sharer's original research design. During that time, a number of conservation goals have also been satisfied as a result of those research activities, reinforcing our thesis that the two fields of endeavor are in fact complementary. A few examples will suffice to illustrate this point. First, the mapping of the remains in the Copán Valley obviously served to further our anthropological understanding of the supporting population of the ancient kingdom of Copán, but just as importantly it has also provided a powerful weapon against modern development of certain areas of the landscape. When our good friend Oscar Cruz, the IHAH representative in Copán, pulls out the archaeological

map published by the first phase of the Proyecto Arqueológico Copán or PAC I (Fash and Long 1983) while discussing a proposed construction or other modification of the landscape that includes ancient sites, it helps him to enforce the cultural patrimony laws that prevent the destruction of antiquities. Second, the excavation and restoration of a number of residential sites in the Las Sepulturas area of the Copán Valley by PAC II (1981-1984) not only provided invaluable scientific data and another attraction for visitors, it also resulted in the annexation of that section of land to the National Park and its permanent protection from damage caused by agriculture, pasture, and other destructive activities. Third, the study of the Acropolis cut has resulted in a tremendous amount of useful scientific information, as well as data of relevance for implementing its protection and consolidation. Fourth, the study of the monumental sculpture required documentation in photographs and scale drawings as a necessary prerequisite, a record that is now proving useful for conservation as well as research purposes, given the accelerating deterioration of this priceless legacy. Last but not least, the study of the ecological history in the valley not only placed the so-called "collapse" in anthropological perspective, it also brought home the need to evaluate current land-use practices in the region, if we are to avoid repeating the lessons of that history.

Thus, we see that the research design that began as "pure" research resulted in tremendously useful applications for conservation. Let us now illustrate how our more recent work shows that the converse is also possible: conservation work designed to protect and document threatened cultural remains can result in tremendously useful and informative research opportunities, insights, and innovations.

The Copán Mosaics Project and its aftermath

In 1985, the Fashes and Rudy Larios began the Copán Mosaics Project, with the blessings and advice of Ricardo Agurcia, then Director of the IHAH. Conservation of the natural as well as cultural resources of the Copán National Park was a primary concern from the beginning. The Project was explicitly designed as a salvage or "rescue" operation, designed to document and conserve the tens of thousands of fragments of stone mosaic facade sculpture scattered about the surface of the

site-core or Principal Group of ruins in Copán. This involved meticulous cataloguing, scale photography and drawing, re-fitting, analysis, interpretation of the fragments of stone sculpture, and their subsequent storage in specialized facilities constructed for this purpose at the Centro Regional de Investigaciones Arqueológicas in Copán. In this way, the state of the stones at the time of cataloguing and storage would be permanently recorded, and the placement of the sculptures in a roofed environment with stable temperature and humidity regimes would ensure their long-term preservation.

The results of the research that derived from the conservation work have been instructive and useful. The Copán Mosaics Project grew quickly into a larger endeavor, the Hieroglyphic Stairway Project, and eventually into the much broader and ambitious Copán Acropolis Archaeological Project. These projects resulted in the idea and eventual founding of our non-profit organization the Copán Association, which holds conservation, investigation, and education to be its three primary, inter-related goals. A review of how all of this took place, and its implications for the wider Maya area, is in order.

The Copán Mosaics Project commenced in the summer of 1985 as a very modest, idealistic enterprise, sponsored by Northern Illinois University, Earthwatch, and the IHAH. There were two main foci of the cataloguing and documentation work: the ballcourt (Structures 10L-9 and -10), and the East Court of the Acropolis. The East Court was the most urgent, because at that time it was considered that the sculptures resting on the east side stairway (since Carnegie times) posed a threat to the stability of the Acropolis cut, and needed to be removed immediately. The ballcourt was chosen for study because it had been completely excavated and restored by the Carnegie Institution of Washington in the 1930s, and we knew that the sample of sculptures from it would be complete. Also, the Carnegie investigators had carefully separated the ballcourt sculptures from the rest of the sculptures piled on the surface of the site by earlier archaeologists and souvenir hunters. This complete, and almost completely pure, sample of sculpture served as the basis for us to see whether it was indeed possible to deduce how the fragments of sculpture fallen from the Principal Group structures were originally articulated, and what their meaning was for the ancient inhabitants of the site.

The methodology we employed was essentially that used by paleontologists, zooarchaeologists, and physical anthropologists when working with skeletal populations from ancient sites: to fit all the broken pieces back together, and then arrive at a Minimum Number of Individual (M.N.I.) count, based on the maximum number of examples of particular bones (in our case, bird sculpture parts) within that population. Thus, when we were able to document 16 bird sculpture for the two structures of the Copán ballcourt, and when Barbara Fash was able to demonstrate that half of the tenons from this complete sample were triangular rather than straight, meaning that they were originally placed around the four corners of both buildings, something rather dramatic resulted. We had proven, on a scientifically sound basis, that Proskouriakoff was right to have eight birds on each building in her magnificent reconstruction drawing, but we had also succeeded in showing that they were all placed between the eight doorways on the buildings (including the four corners), rather than above the doorways. We also documented a series of other motifs not mentioned by Stromsvik in his report nor included in Proskouriakoff's drawing, and showed that the serpent motifs that she sketched in isolation on the corners were in fact part of the wing structures of each of the 16 birds.

The interpretation of this symbolism by Jeff Kowalski was included in our analysis of the ballcourt work first published in the proceedings of the Sixth Mesa Redonda, and basically tied the symbolism on the façades of the Copán ballcourt into existing understandings of the meaning of its floor markers, fertility themes, and cosmological concerns expressed in the setting and the playing of the rubber ballgame in ancient Mesoamerica. Far from being simply "art for art's sake," the ballcourt façade decorations at Copán and the rest of the associated sculptural program told us a great deal about why the game was played, and the ruler's role in perpetuating it through time and space.

The successful application of this methodology and its resultant interpretations in 1985 set the stage for us to tackle a much bigger conservation problem: that of the famous Hieroglyphic Stairway of Structure 10L-26. In his first visit to Copán, Rudy Larios had seen the cascades of water that poured down the Hieroglyphic Stairway during the rainy season, and resolved that something had to be done about it. As Director of

Architectural Restoration during PAC II, he had his chance to fulfill that dream, and in 1985, the same year the Mosaics Project was founded, the support structure, high tension cables, and tarpaulin that he designed went up, at the request of and with funding from Ricardo Agurcia, then Director of the IHAH.

Learning from the past: the case of the Hieroglyphic Stairway

The case of the Hieroglyphic Stairway of Copán is a truly ironic one that provides us with some important lessons. The stairway was first discovered and reported by Maudslay, and subsequently (in 1891 and 1893) excavated by the members of the Honduras Expedition of the Peabody Museum of Harvard University. Under the direction of George Byron Gordon, the blocks of the Hieroglyphic Stairway that had slumped down from their original positions were placed in rows out in the plaza to the west of the structure. Photographs taken by Carnegie investigators some forty years later show that trees had grown up between the blocks and the glyphs were eventually going to be in grave danger both from natural and human forces. Therefore, the Carnegie Institution staff took it upon itself to “repair” the Hieroglyphic Stairway as best it could, in order to protect the blocks and the stairway itself from further damage. With all the best of intentions, they replaced nearly all of the original blocks back onto the pyramidal substructure, using the fifteen steps that were still *in situ* at the base of the stairway as a guide to the width and the pitch of the entire unit. Ironically however, and this is where we should all take note and beware, instead of conserving the New World’s longest hieroglyphic inscription, by restoring the stairway blocks to their original location they in fact contributed to their deterioration. The rainy season storms poured thousands of gallons of water down the stairs, washing away the inscriptions that the Copán kings had hoped would tell their story for all eternity. Less obvious but just as detrimental was the fact that the blocks were in constant contact with the ground moisture beneath them, resulting in the migration of the salts to the surface of the rocks and the eventual exfoliation of the carved surfaces themselves.

Many people ask why the stairs would deteriorate so quickly in modern times, when most of them had survived for over a millennium in near-

ly pristine condition. The answer is two-fold: first, when the stairway was in use, the Copanecs plastered the carved surfaces to protect them from water and the problems that it caused. As it turns out, in ancient times the salts migrated into the protective plaster coating, leaving the original carving intact. Second, for most of that intervening millennium, the stairway blocks were covered with earth, which provided insulation from drastic changes in temperature and humidity. When the blocks were dug up, and exposed to new, harsher conditions with extreme fluctuations in temperature and humidity (basically the tropical equivalent of freezing and thawing), the stones tried to reach equilibrium once more by exfoliating their exterior surfaces, including the carved portions of interest to both ancient and modern observers.

The problem of rapid deterioration after recent exposure is one that Rudy Larios had to confront in Tikal as well. The stucco masks of Structure 5D-33 were left open for the public after the restoration of the North Acropolis had concluded, as were a series of other recently excavated stone and stucco sculptures. All of these have suffered tremendously in the years following their exposure, but none more so than the masks of Structure 5D-33. Rudy’s conclusion is that the greatest contributor to their deterioration was the extremes in temperature to which they were subjected on a daily basis after being exposed, because of the installation of translucent roofing over them. Since that time, thatch roofing has been put in place to restore the original humidity to the masks, and this has proven conducive to their conservation. These lessons from 5D-33, as well as those derived from other work at Tikal and elsewhere, have subsequently been put to good use both in Copán and more recently at Richard Leventhal’s Xunantunich Project, where Rudy is consulting for the Getty Conservation Institute and the Belize Archaeological Commission on questions of architectural and sculpture conservation. Perhaps the most heartening discovery is that by conserving and planting trees in the immediate vicinity of the monuments, the stability in temperature and humidity that they need for long-term conservation and stability is ensured.

The bottom line on this problem is that buildings that are dug specifically to expose their stone masonry and sculpture need to be treated with the utmost of caution and care after the carved sur-

faces are exposed. All of the conservation experts from prestigious institutions around the globe who have seen the Hieroglyphic Stairway are in complete agreement that the only way to conserve what is left of the carving is to remove the original stones to a storage or exhibit area with temperature and humidity control. The Structure 26 originals can then be replaced by replicas. This solution strikes many as shocking and somehow unjust, but it has in fact been quite successfully employed on the Acropolis at Athens, where the original sculptures from the Erechtheum are now on display in the on-site museum in glass cases with climate control, while faithful replicas made of the same kind of marble adorn the portico itself.

When the Hieroglyphic Stairway Project commenced in 1986, we knew that this was the solution that we were after, but we were equally aware that implementing it would be an uphill battle. As a first step, we decided to acquire as much information about the structure itself as possible, including both its archaeological context and architectural makeup, in order to be able to properly plan the conservation work and to demonstrate the historical importance of this building to potential funding agencies. Fortunately, it was not difficult to find scientific justification for the investigation of Structure 10L-26.

The length, complexity, and diversity of the hieroglyphic inscription from the stairway and the temple at its summit were reason enough for a complete program of documentation and investigation. Such a program had in fact commenced years earlier during the first phase of the PAC, under the direction of Claude Baudez, when Project Epigrapher Berthold Riese asked Barbara Fash to begin the task of drawing the entire stairway inscription to scale for documentation and study purposes. Much of the progress made by Riese on the reconstruction of the dynastic sequence of ancient Copán during the PAC I and II projects was a direct outcome of the careful documentation and study of the stairway text.

Beyond the sheer volume and diversity of the inscription was the fact that it was also of tremendous historical importance, on two counts. First, it contained information on earlier rulers in Copán's history, some of whose names did not appear to have been carved on the stelae that were still on display at the time the city was abandoned. This meant that the stairway contained information

unavailable from any other source. Second, this text, and the building that it adorned, were considered by scholars to be the first hieratic monument erected at Copán in the wake of the dramatic defeat of the 13th Copán king, known variously as XVIII Jog or 18 Rabbit, in A.D. 738. This made the decipherment of the text, and the archaeological context of the building and its surviving behavioral residues, of much greater theoretical importance in the milieu of late twentieth century investigation of Classic Maya civilization. Specifically, it was thought to carry important information on the nature and consequences of warfare in the waning years of the Late Classic period, immediately prior to the so-called "collapse." Being a man of his times, William Fash posed the research design in terms of nomothetic propositions, which could be rejected or fail to be rejected based upon the results of the archaeological investigations. As he put it:

The research was designed to test two competing hypotheses:

1. that this structure represented a conquest monument—such as all but two of the other hieroglyphic stairways in the Maya area—in this instance imposed on the Copán polity by the ruler of Quirigua; or
2. that this monument was built as a colossal attempt at re-legitimizing the indigenous Copán royal line, in the aftermath of its political setback at the hands of Quirigua (W. Fash 1988:161-162).

The excavations, epigraphic work, and iconographic studies that resulted from the Hieroglyphic Stairway project provided resounding evidence that the first hypothesis did not hold. On the other hand, there was a great deal of evidence that the stairway had indeed been constructed by the Copán dynasty as a means of reinvigorating local faith in their divine right to rule. The excavations recovered over 3,000 fragments of tenoned mosaic façade sculptures from both the stairway and the temple that stood at its summit, as well as a dedicatory cache with royal heirlooms, and abundant information on the earlier buildings erected on the same spot over 300 years of dynastic history. The epigraphic research showed that the main emphasis was on royal accession of the first fifteen Copán rulers, with special emphasis on the reign and achievements of the twelfth ruler, Smoke Imix God K (Stuart and Schele 1986). The pictorial sculpture

emphasizes royal portraits of those same Copán kings as triumphant warriors bearing shield and lance, surrounded in the case of the temple by large Tlaloc masks, emphasizing their prowess in war. War is not a concern of the imagery or inscriptions of the earlier versions of Structure 26 however, which has led the senior author to conclude that the loss of 18 Rabbit was indeed a subject of the final phase of the Hieroglyphic Stairway (W. Fash 1991). The earlier versions of Structure 26 included three hieroglyphic inscriptions, all of which contain references to the earliest of the Copán kings cited in the final phase hieroglyphic stairway and temple texts (Fash, Williamson, Larios, and Palka 1992). This is not the place to delve into the subject of the veracity of the hieroglyphic texts of Copán, but suffice it to say that a project dedicated to sculpture conservation has provided some highly combustible fuel to that particular theoretical fire.

Two of the methodological breakthroughs that resulted from the Hieroglyphic Stairway Project merit consideration in the present context. The first relates to the original problem of the conservation and study of the tenoned mosaic façade sculptures, the second to the most efficient way to investigate buried early buildings without causing conservation problems or other difficulties such as those that ensued from the excavation strategies used on Tikal Structure 5D-33 or Uaxactun Group V. In studying the stone mosaic sculptures that we recovered from the collapse debris of the temple and hieroglyphic stairway of Structure 26, we found a high degree of consistency with regard to theme, style, and depth of relief. This translated into a breakthrough when we realized that consistency was so strong and reliable that we could use it to identify the pieces found in the piles of sculpture left on the site by earlier archaeologists and, before them, souvenir hunters. The implications of this were obvious and exciting: that scientific excavations of previously unexcavated sides of the Copán buildings could provide a Rosetta Stone for assigning provenience to the thousands of fragments of stone sculpture in surface piles at the Principal Group, providing us with a solution to what had seemed an intractable problem.

Regarding the investigation of buried buildings, the tunneling beneath the Hieroglyphic Stairway had shown that earlier constructions could indeed be meaningfully and economically studied, without having to do damage either to them or to

the final phase architecture. Richard Williamson has presented a paper describing all of the valuable information derived from the tunneling work, which we liken to arthroscopic surgery: maximum gain for minimum pain and intervention.

Nonetheless, in this and other subsequent excavations in the Acropolis, we encountered fragile archaeological remains with which we were not, at first blush, equipped to deal. This brings to the fore another lesson from the work in Copán that must be emphasized. We found that the active, field participation of archaeological conservators is a must for any project working with fragile or unstable archaeological remains. We would like to share the observations of James Tuck and Judith Logan on this subject:

The successful recovery and treatment of archaeological specimens requires specialized knowledge about a variety of materials: how they deteriorate in different burial environments and how to prevent further deterioration during removal, storage, packing and shipping until final stabilization can take place. Some archaeologists may possess such knowledge, but most do not. Those who do are archaeological conservators, and it is clearly best to have their involvement from the start of any excavation liable to produce materials that will require specialized treatment for survival (Tuck and Logan 1987:57).

In our case, we have begun a reciprocal agreement between the Copán Association and the Smithsonian Institution's Conservation Analytical Laboratory in order to begin to address our conservation needs, to continue the training of the local conservation staff, and to help conserve some of the most fragile archaeological specimens recovered in our work. One example of this interaction is the careful documentation, analysis, and conservation of the remains from the Royal Scribe's Tomb, first discovered in 1989. The investigation, consolidation, analysis, and conservation of the tomb and *in situ* remains continues four years later, with the active participation of C.A.L. conservators.

We have been heartened by the results of the scientific aspects of the Mosaics and Hieroglyphic Stairway Projects, which in the course of the next couple of years, will transform our dream of producing a replica of the stairs and of Stela M into reality. Our results have also brought a great deal of support from the Honduran government and other sources encouraging us to apply the lessons of the convergence of conservation and

investigation on a much broader and deeper scale, to the Copán Acropolis Archaeological Project.

The Copán Acropolis Archaeological Project

Beginning in 1988, this large-scale endeavor has sought to complete the conservation of the Acropolis Cut, the final phase buildings that were partially investigated but not always stabilized or restored by previous investigators, and the remaining stone sculptures scattered about the site. The final phase buildings that have been restored in the Main Acropolis area include Structures 16, 21, 21A, 22, 22A, and 26. Structures 29-33 and 41-42 of the royal residential area on the south flank of the Acropolis have also been restored following the meticulous excavations of one of our PAAC Co-Directors, Will Andrews. Last but not least, the conservation and study of the tenoned mosaic façade sculptures continues unabated and with many dramatic successes. Let us briefly review the work on one final phase building as an example of this process.

Structure 22A, located west of Temple 22, was partially investigated by the Carnegie Institution in the late 1930s, but when it was found that no hieroglyphic inscriptions adorned its interior, the building was abandoned and largely forgotten. In 1986, Barbara Fash noted that the fragments of beveled stone we were finding in the collapse debris from the north side of Structure 22A, while investigating the south side of Structure 26, were identical to those found still *in situ* on the east side of the building. In examining this material, she posed the question whether this structure might represent a mat house, literally *Papal Nah* or *Popol Otot*, as recorded for sixteenth century Maya communities. These were used as Council Houses, where the ruler convened with the representatives of the people to discuss the affairs of state. The investigation of Structure 22A provided abundant information in support of her hypothesis, including 10 large mats on the four façades of the building, labeling it for all to see as the Mat House. Also found were portraits of eight representatives of the people, each seated above a large hieroglyphic that named the place they came to represent, and other glyphs labeling the building as *a zac nic te'il na*, translated in the Cordomex Dictionary as a council house, thus "White Flower House." Finally, a portrait of the ruler who commissioned the building dominates the proceedings from his position on the

roof comb (B. Fash et al 1992). Perhaps the most exciting aspect of all this is that it provides us not only with archaeological evidence for the means of government in Classic Maya kingdoms, but also for the names of the most important kingdoms in the Copán polity in the eighth century A.D., names that may now be looked for among the many archaeological sites in the Copán Valley that contain pictorial and hieroglyphic sculpture (B. Fash 1992). Indeed, the work of Andrews and his colleagues in the royal residential area to the south of the Acropolis, has provided convincing evidence that it was one of the eight divisions of the kingdom who sent a representative to the Council House (Andrews and Fash 1992).

The discovery, documentation, and study of the "Rosalila" Structure by Ricardo Agurcia is a primary example of the tunneling of Acropolis structures to investigate the earlier versions of the buildings and their historical contexts (Agurcia and Stone 1991). This structure was conserved by the Maya in its entirety by being built over in the late seventh century A.D., allowing us a unique window onto Copán architecture and stucco sculpture. This unique corpus of sculpture presented us not only with unprecedented information, but also with a formidable challenge in conservation. With the help of Rodolfo Vallín, a UNESCO specialist in stucco conservation, Agurcia began an intensive conservation project that resulted in the training of a number of local staff in stucco conservation, and the stabilization of the stucco decorations of the magnificent "Rosalila." Eventually, the excavation of the stucco was done not by the archaeological staff, but by the restoration crew. Of course, in conservation as with any science, techniques and methods change with time, and we are now in the process of soliciting the technical assistance of our Mexican colleagues at Churrusco regarding the conservation and stabilization of another set of architectural stucco decorations that adorned "Margarita," the earliest pyramidal construction in the Acropolis.

The investigations and conservation work on "Rosalila" revealed a series of eye-opening windows onto the Maya past (Agurcia and Fash 1991). The hieroglyphic step on the stairs of "Rosalila" indicates that it was built by the tenth Copán ruler, Moon Jaguar, who designed it to have three stories, with the two upper-most serving as the core of its roof crest. The sculpture adorning this building revolves around the sun, the sacred mountain, and

creation, sacred themes in keeping with its sacred position. It sits squarely over the original nucleus of the Copán Acropolis and what may be the tomb of the founder of the Copán dynasty, Yax K'uk' Mo'. The contextual information provided by the tunnels beneath "Rosalila" finally give us a likely answer for why this building was considered so sacred that it was buried intact: it was the most hallowed temple on the Acropolis, erected above the holy ground in which the founder built the first temple, in which he was buried. For this reason also, the sixteenth and final king of Copán, Yax Pac, built the final version of Structure 16 over it. References to the founder can be found in the inner chamber and exterior façades of the temple, and on Altar Q in front of them, which is named literally as "the stone of Yax K'uk' Mo'." The historic centerpiece of the Acropolis has now been firmly placed in both archaeological and cultural context.

The work on "Rosalila," the Council House, the Hieroglyphic Stairway, and the other Acropolis and Copán Valley monuments has produced so much order and information out of what had previously been chaos, that the President of Honduras, Rafael Leonardo Callejas, has approved and directly funded our plans for a monumental Sculpture Museum in Copán. This museum was conceived by the authors, and designed by the Honduran architect Angela Stassano in conjunction with them, as a place where the finest and most informative original sculptures of Copán could be displayed for the public, and conserved for posterity. The only replica in the building will be a full-scale model of Rosalila Structure, which will serve as the centerpiece and bring home the fact that the most abundant and in many cases most beautiful sculptures in Copán were not the stelae and altars, but the dozens of buildings adorned with façade and interior space architectural sculpture. Six complete building façades, parts of eight other structures, and four original stelae with their altars will be displayed in the central module of the museum, which is scheduled to open in January of 1994. Over 3,000 individual pieces of sculpture will illustrate the themes of the Underworld, divine kingship, fertility, war, the nobility, and the king's council, serving as an illustration of how conservation and investigation can and do converge at Copán.

The Copán Association and the future of the Maya past

The Museum is being built by the Copán Association, a private non-profit organization that we founded, along with a number of other concerned Honduran citizens, as a means of providing technical and financial support to the IHAH and the government of Honduras for the goal of securing the conservation and investigation of Copán and its physical environment in perpetuity. The conservation of the Maya ruins of Copán is just one aspect of our prescribed mission. Education, for all levels of Honduran students and people around the world, is another major goal for the Copán Association. One way in which both these goals are being met is by the construction, the museography, and a guide for the new sculpture museum, all of which are being carried out by the Association. We have also published a guide to the archaeological park in both Spanish and English (Agurcia and Fash 1992), and are working on the publication of other books addressed to different education levels.

The conservation of the physical environment that made a Classic Maya kingdom possible in Copán is another major goal for the Association, through reforestation (presently being implemented) and land acquisition and management programs, which we are working on. Finally, the Copán Association is also active in other parts of the country, in conservation and cultural resource management projects, in support of our larger mission in areas outside of the Copán Valley.

We are always open to visits and collaboration from Maya speakers from Guatemala, Belize, and Mexico and are working to preserve and build upon the ancestral aspects of Maya culture that are alive and well in the traditional culture of western Honduras. This includes working with local artisans, maintaining an active dialogue with our workers, our neighbors, and the local elementary and secondary level students about the meaning of the Maya legacy to them, recording folk tales and Maya words that have survived (*tetunte* being one that made quite a splash, of late), and so forth. Happily, we are putting our money where our mouth is, because in carrying out our goals, we also serve as the largest employment generators in the region.

In sum, we like to think that the future of the Maya past is a bright one indeed, providing that conservation is put at the forefront. We hope that the work at Copán and other places will extend to all the Maya area, as the benefits of the convergence of conservation and investigation become clear to all concerned. The vestiges of ancient Maya culture are not just a fertile field for anthropological and humanistic research, they are also the proud heritage of modern nations who stand to learn from errors past and grandeurs achieved, and who look into the future with hope. They are also a key resource for the balanced economic development of depressed rural areas occupied by the historical descendants of the ancient Maya.

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