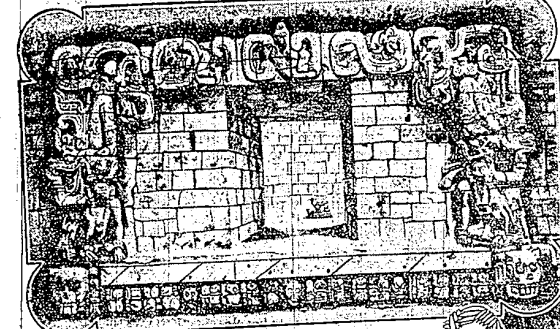


COPAN, THE MOTHER CITY OF THE MAYAS

By SYLVANUS G. MORELY

THE ruins of Copan are situated in the valley of the Copan river in the western part of the Republic of Honduras only a few miles from the boundary of Guatemala. Mountains, the foothills of the Cordillera, reaching an altitude of some 2,500 feet, surround it on every side, their lower slopes overgrown with a well-nigh impenetrable thicket of low trees and bushes, and their summits sparsely covered with pine. The valley at this point is about a mile and a half wide, and it is upon this rich river plain that the ancient Maya metropolis was built. The river here flows east and west, now skirting the northern foothills, and again having crossed the plain, rushing along the base of the southern slopes, a modest stream, only forced in the dry season, but a raging, swollen torrent frequently overflowing its banks after the rains have set in. This pleasant valley surrounded on all side by



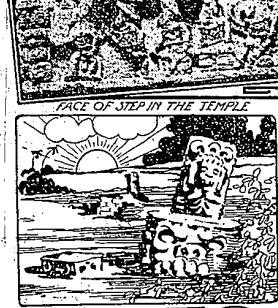
RESTORATION OF DOORWAY TO INNER CHAMBER OF GREAT TEMPLE

mountains of considerable height, supplied with an abundance of never failing streams, and renewed for its fertility, offers a striking contrast to the parched waterless plains of northern Yucatan, which form the general environment of northern Maya sites. With the former the water supply was never a question of moment, but with the latter its satisfactory solution in a few places only, absolutely determined the distribution of the aboriginal population. And yet, unlike as these two regions are, the Maya civilization, which overspread both of them, was of sufficient homogeneity, as we shall see, to follow in each one much the same lines of cultural development. At the very beginning of our study of Copan we find ourselves confronted with a grave difficulty, namely, the entire absence of aboriginal tradition concerning the place, which consequently renders a reconstruction of the historical background impossible. In Yucatan we were able to piece together some what of the early history of the principal cities, such as Chichen Itza, and Uxmal, from the account of native as well as Spanish writers, many of whom derived their information from those well acquainted with the former history of the country. And while this information is often quite fragmentary, nevertheless it sheds a very considerable light on the pre-Columbian history of these two northern cities, and in a measure, at least, dispels that darkness and obscurity which so completely enshrouds almost all the other great centers of the Maya culture.

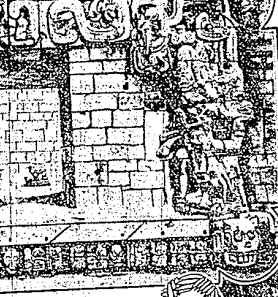
Concerning the former history of Copan, however, we know absolutely nothing, excepting the tradition of very doubtful value given below. In 1591, or thereabouts, Diego Garcia de Paredes, an official of the pre-Columbian history of these two northern cities, and in a measure, at least, dispels that darkness and obscurity which so completely enshrouds almost all the other great centers of the Maya culture.

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Unfortunately, the reliability of this tradition is disproved by many different lines of evidence to permit our rejecting it. In the first place, the structures of Copan are far too numerous and massive to have been built within the span of a single life, and its elaborately sculptured monuments are far too large to have been carved in one generation with the tools available. Had that "Great lord from Yucatan" lived twice the allotted three score years and ten, his life, even then, could



FACE OF STEP IN THE TEMPLE



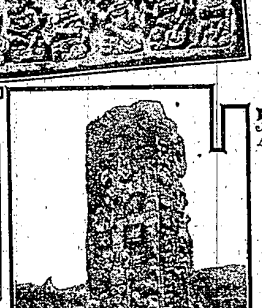
A WELL-PRESERVED STELA



WEST SIDE OF DOORWAY LEADING TO THE INNER CHAMBER

not have embraced one-fourth of the period of building activity at Copan. Again, as we shall see, the hieroglyphic inscriptions at Copan indicate that it was far older than any of the Yucatan sites, and that it probably had been abandoned many years before the rise of the great northern cities. Still another reason for doubting that Copan was colonized from Yucatan arises when we examine the historical data bearing on each. All the early writers, native as well as Spanish, with the exception of Paredes, above quoted, pass over the great southern metropolis in absolute silence; but when they come to describe Yucatan nearly all of them mention the two largest of the ancient cities there, Chichen Itza and Uxmal, and in some instances even give brief outlines of their history. The striking absence of tradition relating to such an explosive site as Copan can only indicate one thing—that its fall and subsequent desolation had put into the memory of man even at the time of the Spanish Conquest in 1519, and a generation later, when Paredes visited the place, it had been forgotten so long that he was unable to find out anything about its former history except the very dubious tradition given above.

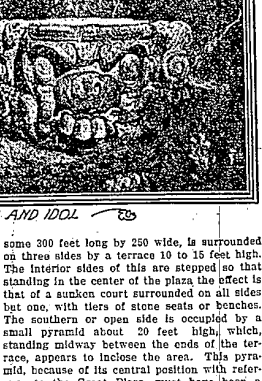
The ruins were more easily reached today from Guatemala than from Honduras, in which latter Republic they are located. One leaves the Guatemala Northern railroad at Zacapa, and either by horseback or cart, journeys eastward for two days, stopping overnight at Jacatzin. The actual distance traveled cannot be more than 35 or 40 miles at the outside, but the road is so rough and winds through country so mountainous that it takes two days to reach the ruins after leaving the railroad. The modern village of Copan, where one can secure accommodations of a sort, is about three-quarters of a mile from the main group of ruins. It is built over a part of the site of the ancient city, and thus two beautifully sculptured altars standing in the plaza under a large tree. Several other sculptural monuments are to be found in various places and chicken yards throughout the village, and there is another group of two or three, a short distance to the northwest in the "campo santo" or burying ground.



SEATED FIGURE (PARTIALLY RESTORED) IN CENTER OF STAIRWAY



STONE AND IDOL



STONE AND IDOL

some 300 feet long by 250 wide, is surrounded on three sides by a terrace 10 to 15 feet high. The interior sides of this are stepped so that standing in the center of the plaza the effect is that of a sunken court surrounded on all sides but one, with tiers of stone seats or benches. The southern or open side is occupied by a small pyramid about 20 feet high, which, standing midway between the ends of the terrace, appears to divide the area. This pyramid, because of its central position with reference to the Great Plaza, must have been a much more important structure than its size would seem to indicate. Standing on its summit and looking northward, a great open air auditorium lies at one's feet. Tier upon tier of stone benches rising around its sides, and five great monumental statues, poised like gigantic sentinels guarding its sacred precincts.

This mound, so conspicuously located on the open side of the Great Plaza, attracted the attention of the English traveler and archaeologist, Mr. A. P. Maudslayi, who visited Copan in 1854, spending several months there in photographing and making molds of the sculptures and in studying the ruins. He cleared its sides and excavated it. The summit, he says, is very small, and shows no signs of any building ever having stood there. Digging through the floor he sank a shaft into the interior of the pyramid and found at a depth of six feet from the top an earthen pot, which contained several jade beads, a few pearls, a jade spindle wheel, perforated disk, and some roughly carved pieces of pearl shell. The bottom of the pot was covered with some finely ground cinnamon and several ounces of quick lime. Fragments of human bones were taken out during the course of these excavations and, finally, at a depth of nine feet below the level of the plain, a skeleton of a Jaguar was uncovered.

The sides and backs of these monuments are also covered with hieroglyphics, though this latter is not a constant feature. Near each one of them, usually just in front, there is a smaller block of stone, sometimes round and sometimes square. These, because of their close connection with the larger figures, have been called altars, and it is not unlikely that they may have served some such purpose. They are elaborately sculptured with grotesque figures and in some cases with hieroglyphics also. Leaving the Great Plaza and its interesting monuments behind, and proceeding southward about 100 yards, we enter a narrow court 290 feet in length by 135 feet in width. This inclosure has been named "The Court of the Hieroglyphic Stairway," because of its most remarkable feature—an imposing flight of stairs ascending the pyramid at its southern end. This stairway, including the elaborate sculptured balustrades of each side, measures 32 feet in width at its base, originally must have been one of the most beautiful parts of the city, judging from the elaborate sculptures now strewn in it in great profusion. On its south side rises the highest pyramid at Copan, the summit 112 feet above the level of the river. Across the greater part of the western side extends a broad, rather low stairway, flanked by two life-sized rampant jaguars sculptured in high relief. This flight of steps leads to a broad terrace overlooking another court. The remaining sides of the Eastern Court are occupied by high terraces, which support a number of ruled structures. One of these on the northern terrace was excavated by Mr. Maudslayi, who found there a beautiful interior doorway nine feet wide, over which there is an elaborate frieze supported at its ends by crouching human figures of heroic size, the whole being carved in high relief all most amounting to sculpture in the round. The structures on the eastern and remaining terrace have for the most part disappeared, their destruction having been due to a change in the course of the Copan river, which now washes the exterior base of this terrace. This stairway of the great substructure of the main group of buildings by the river is one of the most interesting and at the same time deplorable features at Copan, since ultimately, if not checked, it can mean nothing more nor less than the total destruction of the city.

But this wholesale demolition is not being accomplished without its accompanying lesson in archaeology. This great vertical wall, cut by the river all along the eastern side of the main group, is the largest cross-section of an archaeological site in the world. Here, like an open book, one may read the successive periods of the city's growth. At different levels from the hollows upward throughout the rubble hearing of the substructure there are horizontal strata of cut paving stones. These are the pavements of different plazas dating from successive epochs of the city's history, and they clearly demonstrate that the growth of Copan has been gradual, and at the same time rapid. As the population increased, newer and larger structures and plazas were built to meet the needs of the growing city. These constructions, as we see from the cross-section of the substructure, were built directly above the older ones. When it became necessary to build a new plaza its rubble foundations were laid on the paving of the old plaza which was to be replaced, and thus the highest of the substructure slowly increased. A careful study of the floor of these successive plazas would doubtless teach much as to the different epochs of the city's occupancy, and might even reveal important facts relative to its history.

Before closing this description, it may not be out of place to explain here our reasons for having called Copan "The Mother City of the Mayas." Briefly stated, it is because of the greater antiquity of its hieroglyphic inscriptions compared with those of any other Maya city now known. This greater age of Copan is indicated, not only by the actual dates recorded in its earliest inscriptions, but also by a cruder technique in their execution. Later, in the best periods of the ancient Maya civilization, sculpture is found to be in very high relief or even in the round, and is characterized by a great profusion and elaboration of detail. Nothing of this, however, appears in the earliest monuments of Copan, where the relief is so low that it amounts to little more than high relief, the sculptor apparently not feeling sure enough of his technique to attempt anything more ambitious.

As to this question of technique, however, the dates themselves, recorded on these more crudely sculptured monuments are much earlier than those on the more elaborate ones. The earliest historic date at Copan preceded the earliest historic dates of all the other Maya cities by intervals ranging from 50 to 100 years, or, expressed in terms of Maya chronology, from one to fifteen katuns, the Maya "katun" being approximately equal to 20 of our own years. For these two reasons, then, the prehistoric character of its earliest monuments and the actual priority of its earliest dates, we have called Copan "The Mother City of the Mayas."

WHY BE WEAK?

Why suffer, backache, headache, dizziness, weariness, urinary irregularities and other troubles that arise from disordered kidneys when relief is so near at hand? Doan's Kidney Pills have cured thousands. M. J. George, Earl, Madison, Neb., says: "For over a year I was afflicted with terrible kidney trouble. I was subject to hot flashes, became dizzy and felt tired and exhausted. Puffy spots appeared beneath my eyes and my feet were so swollen I could scarcely wear my shoes. I noticed improvement after I began taking Doan's Kidney Pills and was soon cured. The swelling and bloating disappeared, I can rest like a child and have gained ten pounds in weight." Remember the name—Doan's. For sale by druggists and regional storekeepers everywhere. Price 75c. Foster-McMillan Co., Buffalo, N. Y.

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THE USUAL WAY.



Sho—We distrust those who suffer us. Ho—And dislike those who do not.

FOUND RIGHT PATH After a False Start.

"In 1890 I began to drink coffee. At that time I was healthy and enjoyed life. At first I noticed no bad effects from the indulgence but in course of time found that various troubles were coming upon me. "Painstaking of the heart took upon itself sick and nervous headaches, kidney troubles followed and eventually my stomach became so deranged that even a light meal caused me serious distress. "Our physician's prescriptions failed to help me, and then I used myself with patent medicines till I was thoroughly disgusted and hopeless. "Finally I began to suspect that coffee was the cause of my troubles. I experimented by leaving it off, except for one small cup of breakfast. This helped some but did not altogether remove my distress. It satisfied me, however, that I was on the right track. "So I gave up coffee altogether and began to use Postum. In ten days I found myself greatly improved, my nerves steady, my head clear, my kidneys working better and better, my heart's action rapidly improving, my appetite improved and the ability to eat a hearty meal without subsequent suffering restored to me. And this condition remains. "Leaving off coffee and using Postum did this, with no help from drugs, as I abandoned the use of medicines when I began to use the food drink. Name given by Postum Co., Battle Creek, Mich. "There's a reason, and it is explained in the little book, 'The Road Well-travelled,' in plain English. "Ever read the above letter? A new one appears from time to time. They are genuine, true, and full of human interest."