



The Margarita Panel is a grand, modeled-stucco building panel carved around 450 CE in Copan. MAYA 2012 features a replica of this monumental piece in its full-color splendor. Photo courtesy: Early Copan Acropolis Project, Penn Museum.

About the Penn Museum Excavations at Copan, Honduras

The Early Copan Acropolis Program

Excavations at the capital of the Classic Maya kingdom of Copan have uncovered the palaces, temples, and physical remains of a royal dynasty dating from 426 to 822 CE. Copan was the capital of a large and prosperous kingdom during the Classic period (250 to 900 CE) of Maya civilization. Located in western Honduras, Copan is an UNESCO World Heritage Site that attracts thousands of visitors from all over the world. From 1989 to 2003 the Early Copan Acropolis Program (ECAP) of the Penn Museum conducted excavations at Copan to document the origins and architectural history of the Acropolis, the famous royal center of the site, and to correlate these findings with Copan's dynastic history. Working with the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia, ECAP excavated some 3 kms of tunnels beneath the Acropolis uncovering architecture, inscriptions, and tombs dating to 400-600 CE.

The Copan Acropolis excavations provide the most thoroughly-documented and unique body of information on the origins of a Classic Maya kingdom ever assembled. ECAP's research has fundamentally enhanced our knowledge of the development of Maya states through the discovery of several new Early Classic hieroglyphic texts, a sequence of well-preserved funerary temples, the tomb and royal residence of the founder of the Copan dynasty (K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo', reigned 426-437), the elaborate tomb of a royal lady (most likely the Founder's Queen, name unknown), and the tomb of Copan's 8th king (Wil Ohl K'inich, reigned 534-551). Of special importance was the discovery and documentation of Copan's earliest royal palaces that provides some of the most crucial evidence for the origins of the Copan state and its sociopolitical organization.