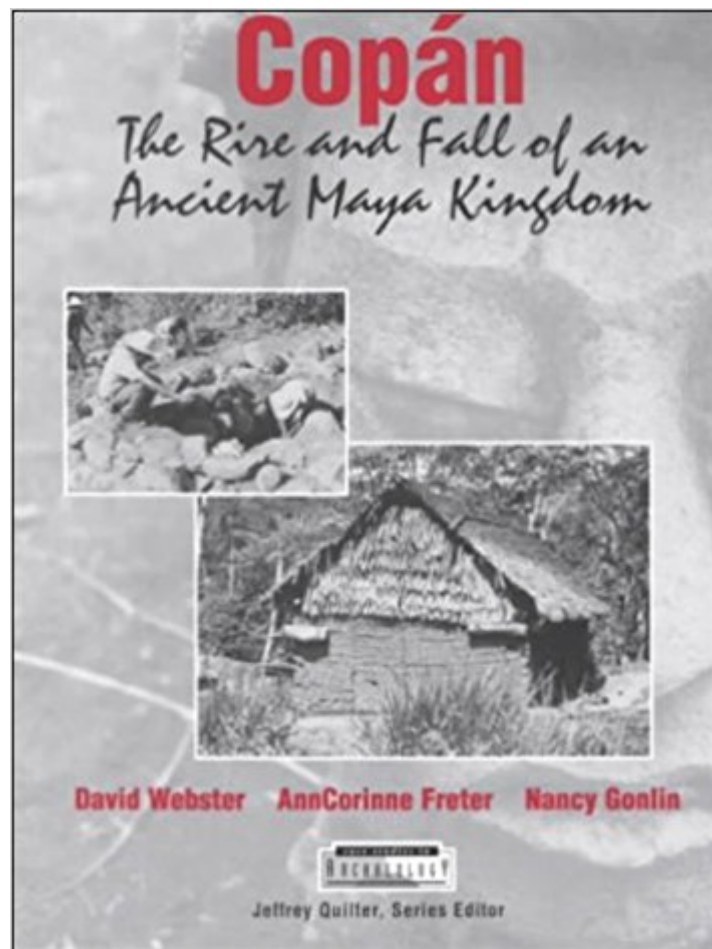




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Copan: The Rise And Fall Of An Ancient Maya Kingdom (Case Studies In Archeology)



Synopsis

Webster's case study reconstructs and evaluates the sociopolitical system and culture history of a world-famous Classic Maya Center in the highlands of Western Honduras, whose great temples, palaces, and carved monuments have been investigated since the 1830's. Using material from a series of archaeological excavations begun in 1975 that focused on reconstructing the entire Copán Kingdom, this book presents for the first time an interpretation of the political, demographic, and agricultural history of the entire region. Providing an extensive review of the methods used to reconstruct Copán's history, the book helps students develop a basic understanding of how archaeologists reconstruct ancient social systems.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Copan is one of the great cities of the ancient Maya world, now in Honduras, and its spectacular 3D sculpture and colorful architecture is easily visited. The authors here focus on what is not so easily seen, the former growth and life of the metropolis and its mountain valley. Their Penn State project has been investigating the outlying community and households in a series of suburban and rural studies summarized here. These supplement, extend, and counter-check the Harvard-linked studies of the other half, the central "downtown" core with its famous statues and buildings (like the perfectly preserved "Rosalilla" temple) (go to books by Newsome or Fash for what you will not see here). This is an intriguing, if somewhat technical, book. It is a very nice summary of the workings of the Copan city-state. It reports on the material underpinnings of ancient Maya society and the "dirt archaeology" side of what is usually on view as the elite and fantastical Maya. It is for people

seriously interested in the ancient Maya and not just the flashy and bloodthirsty kings. And also for those seeking studies of civilizations/cities or a Case Study for students of course. The text is clearly and directly written, especially if you are already familiar with American archaeological terminology. You will find here almost nothing of the spectacular finds, and no color images, but a good selection of maps and charts in black and white. To mention only a few points, instead of the expected chronology based on the reigns of kings and changes in pottery, the authors present a chapter on Freter's controversial obsidian hydration dating method (depth of water adsorption since the last chipping of volcanic glass tools correlates with time). This analysis is the prime support for their surprising and fascinating contention that common people continued in residence around Copan long after the king and then the nobility had faded away. The unexplored implication, if this scenario is true, is that Maya kings were unnecessary to Maya farmers (versus what the rulers say in their art) and therefore parasitic exploiters. The authors' skillfully and comprehensively developed conclusion is for the collapse of Copan from a system of overpopulation and internal loss of royal legitimacy, a significant change from Webster's former promulgation of military answers. The authors make a strong argument for their particular point of view, while drawing on the results of all studies of Copan.

I'm heading to Honduras on an archaeological trip soon. This book was on the reading list. I tried to find it at Half Price Books but was not successful so I had to pay retail. It's OK. It's VERY academic and I found it difficult reading - my mind kept straying to the Moon Guide to Honduras instead. But I slugged through it.

No trouble.

This book felt like a Univ. text and outlines the scope of archaeological studies at Copan. Such a small book falls short of providing the interesting details we Mayanofiles crave. The cover photo in grey was poorly chosen when so many facinating and dramatic choices were available. After an introduction several review papers are presented and the most interesting for me were the C4 and C3 data extracted from human and other animal bone demonstrating among other things that the Copan people (and their dogs) ate mostly corn and maybe very little else. The second interesting review dealt with the rate of hydration (v. slow water up-take) in obsidian (volcanic glass) fragments scattered throughout numerous digs. This relatively new rate technique can help date a site as obsidian glass is found at almost all habitations in all time levels. This glass made the

cutting tools of the people. The technique seems to be quite good with little variance and is backed by the older C14 method. I read this book cover to cover and my interest drifted occasionally.

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