

COPAN AND QUIRIGUA: SHIFTING DESTINIES IN THE SOUTHEASTERN MAYA LOWLANDS

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Abstract

Copan and Quirigua were important southeastern Maya lowland cities in the Classic period (ca. AD 400-850). Three decades of archaeological and epigraphic research have revealed their complex relationship over some 400 years. Inscriptions record the founding of Copan and its subordinate center at Quirigua in AD 426/27. Archaeology has revealed tombs at both cities that appear to belong to their founding rulers, later venerated by their successors. Copan and Quirigua prospered for a century before suffering setbacks at the end of the Early Classic period (ca. AD 600). After recovery and renewed prosperity during the Late Classic period, their destinies were transformed by the ambitions of Quirigua to break free from Copan. Inscriptions record a war in AD 738 that saw Quirigua defeat Copan, capture its 13th king, and sacrifice him at Quirigua. As a result Quirigua became the capital of a newly formed Maya state and enjoyed a century of expansion well documented by archaeology. Over the same period Copan regained its prosperity, although the power of its kings decreased. A text at Quirigua suggests a restored relationship between the rulers of both Maya capitals at the end of the Classic era, followed by their rapid decline and abandonment by ca. AD 850.

Resumen

Copan y Quirigua eran importantes ciudades del sudeste de las tierras bajas Mayas en el período Clásico (ca. 400-850 d.C.). Tres décadas de investigaciones han revelado su relación compleja durante aproximadamente 400 años. Las inscripciones registran la fundación en 426/27 d.C. de Copan y su centro subordinado en Quirigua. La arqueología reveló tumbas en ambas ciudades que parecen pertenecer a sus gobernantes fundadores, más tarde veneradas por sus sucesores. Copan y Quirigua prosperaron durante un siglo antes de sufrir reveses al final de período Clásico Temprano (ca. 600 d.C.). Después de su recuperación y prosperidad renovada durante el período Clásico Tardío, sus destinos fueron transformados por las ambiciones de Quirigua de liberarse de Copan. Las inscripciones registran una guerra en 738 d.C. la derrota de Copan por parte de Quirigua, la captura de su 13^o rey y su sacrificio en Quirigua. Por lo tanto Quirigua se hizo la capital de un estado Maya recién formado y disfrutó de un siglo de prosperidad documentada por la arqueología. Durante el mismo período Copan recobró su prosperidad, aunque el poder de sus reyes disminuyera. Un texto de Quirigua sugiere una relación restaurada entre las ciudades de ambas capitales mayas a finales de la era Clásica, seguida por su rápido declive y abandono hacia el 850 d.C.

INTRODUCTION

Copan was the capital of an important kingdom that dominated the southeastern Maya region for most of the Classic period, which is defined in this region to date from ca. AD 400 to ca. 850. For much of this span the smaller river port of Quirigua was part of this kingdom, until Copan was defeated in 738 and Quirigua gained its independence. Much of the Copan kingdom's prosperity and power was

founded on the rich resources of the southeastern region, along with its major trade routes. Among the most important of these southeastern products were cacao, jade, and obsidian. In addition to these economic resources, during the three centuries it controlled Quirigua as its principal satellite, Copan was also master over one of the most important trade corridors in the Maya area, the Motagua river valley connecting the Maya highlands and the Caribbean Sea. Furthermore, for its entire history Copan itself was situated to control a major overland trade route between the Maya area and the remainder of Central America to the east.

Over the past three decades combined archaeological and epigraphic research has revealed much about the complex relationship between Copan and Quirigua. The main source of archaeological data for Quirigua comes from the Quirigua Project (1974-79), sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania Museum and directed by William Coe and Robert Sharer (Ashmore 1979, 1984, 1987, 2007; Coe & Sharer 1983; Jones 1987; Jones & Sharer [in press]; Schortman 1993; Schortman & Urban 1983; Sharer 1978, 1985a, 1985b, 1988, 1990, 1991, 2002; Sharer & Jones 1986). The Quirigua Project was one of the first investigations of a Classic Maya site to combine archaeological and epigraphic data in defining its original research goals, in gathering its data, and in formulating its conclusions (Sharer 1978).

Copan has been investigated by a continuous series of research projects since 1976, but in this discussion we rely mostly on results from the Copan Acropolis Archaeological Project, or "PAAC" (1988-96), directed by William Fash (Agurcia 1996, 2004; Andrews & Fash 2005; Fash 1988, 2001, 2002; Fash *et al.* 2004; Fash & Fash 2000; Sharer *et al.* 1999), and the University of Pennsylvania Museum's Early Copan Acropolis Program, or "ECAP" (1989-2003), directed by Robert Sharer (Bell 2002, 2004; Bell *et al.* 2004; Sedat & López 2004; Sharer 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2004; Sharer *et al.* 2004; Sharer *et al.* 1999; Traxler 2001, 2003, 2004). ECAP and a series of other research programs were unified during the operation of the PAAC, and this consortium practiced a conjunctive research strategy that combined archaeological, epigraphic, and other collateral disciplines (Buikstra *et al.* 2004; Carrelli 2004; Fash & Sharer 1991; Price *et al.* 2010; Reents-Budet *et al.* 2004; Stuart 1992).

While Quirigua's victory over Copan in AD 738 is well known, far less is known about the origins and development of the relationship between these two cities that led up to this watershed event. It is fairly certain that for over 300 years during the Early Classic and first part of the Late Classic eras (ca. AD 400-700) Quirigua was subordinate to Copan (Martin & Grube 2008). In this paper we will discuss the intertwined histories of Copan and Quirigua, with an emphasis on this lesser-known early period of their relationship (Schele 1990a; Sharer 2002). Since the goals of the ECAP investigations were directed toward increasing our understanding of Copan's Early Classic sociopolitical development, ca. AD 400-600 (Bell 2002, 2004; Bell *et al.* 2004; Sharer 2002, 2003a, b; Sharer *et al.* 2005; Sharer *et al.* 1999; Traxler 2001, 2003, 2004), the findings from this research will be especially critical to illuminate the early period of the relationship between these two cities.

COPAN

Archaeology reveals that the Copan Valley has been occupied by farming communities since the later stages of the Early Preclassic period, ca. 1100-1200 BC (Andrews & Fash 2005; Fash 2001). By the Late Preclassic period (ca. 400 BC - AD 200) a series of small hilltop sites were distributed along the Copan River drainage (Canuto 2004; Canuto *et al.* 2011; Fash 2001; Sharer & Traxler 2006). History begins in the Copan Valley with recorded Maya dates as early as AD 159 (Schele 1987; Stuart 1989, 2004). The site of Copan itself is situated on the Copan River near the center of the largest alluvial pocket in the Copan Valley (Fash 2001). Data from both archaeology and deciphered texts

indicate that Maya lords ruled at Copan by the end of the Late Preclassic era (Fash 2001; Sharer & Traxler 2006; Stuart 1989; 2004) and that early in the 5th century AD Copan became the capital of a Maya kingdom with the founding of a new ruling dynasty (Fash 2001; Fash *et al.* 2004; Schele 1992; Sharer 2002; Stuart 2004; Stuart & Schele 1986).

At the core of the new capital was the Acropolis, comprising the palaces, temples, and tombs of the kingdom's Classic period rulers. Tunnel excavations conducted by ECAP and two collateral PAAC programs have revealed the complex architectural history of the Acropolis, with multiple superimposed platforms supporting dozens of buildings now buried beneath its surface (Agurcia 2004; Fash 2001; Sharer *et al.* 2005). On the northern flank of the Acropolis is the Hieroglyphic Stairway that records Copan's dynastic history (Fash 2001, 2002; Fash *et al.* 2004). Next to it stands the great Ball Court and beyond is the Monument Plaza, the setting for the largest grouping of Copan's ornately carved stelae and altars (Fash 2001, 2002), originally laid out during the founding era (Traxler 2004). After almost 400 years of construction, the latest Acropolis buildings visible today rose some 15 m above its initial platform built during the founding era (Sharer *et al.* 2005).

Retrospective texts record the founding of Copan's ruling dynasty by a king named *K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo'* in AD 426/427 (Stuart 2004; Stuart & Schele 1986). Archaeology indicates *K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo'* consolidated centralized political power and founded the Classic period Copan state (Canuto 2004; Fash 2001; Fash *et al.* 2004; Sharer 2002, 2003a, 2003b). The founding events are recounted on Altar Q, dedicated by Copan's 16th king, Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat (Fash 2001; Stuart 1992; Stuart & Schele 1986). The four sides of the altar display the portraits of 16 Copan rulers seated on thrones formed by their name glyphs, beginning with *K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo'* who hands the royal scepter to *Yax Pasaj*. Behind the founder is his son, Ruler 2, followed by the succession of Copan's kings, four to a side. The text on Altar Q records the inauguration of *K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo'* at an unknown location on September 6, 426, and his arrival in Copan five months later on February 9, 427 (Stuart 2004).

QUIRIGUA

The site of Quirigua is located some 50 km north of Copan on the banks of the far larger Motagua River, in the middle of a vast and fertile flood plain. Deep deposits of silt from periodic Motagua floods have buried most evidence of Preclassic occupation in the valley. As recorded on Zoomorph P, dedicated in AD 795, Quirigua's history begins with a retelling of the 426/427 founding events at Copan with an additional mention of an individual known as *Tok Casper*, who was inaugurated as Quirigua's first ruler under the authority of *K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo'* (Looper 2003; Martin & Grube 2008). Although little is known of the Quirigua Founder, he could well have journeyed with *K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo'* to the southeast region, presumably from the Peten, where he was installed by his overlord as Quirigua's first ruler (Sharer 2002).

The Zoomorph P inscription clearly implies that Quirigua was founded as a subordinate of Copan. Quirigua's location makes it equally clear that it was established as a river port to control the lucrative Motagua trade route and its commodities – which would have included cacao, obsidian, and jade. This conclusion is further supported by archaeology. The Quirigua Project's investigations in the 1970s found evidence that the ancient course of the Motagua River flowed along the western edge of Quirigua's main group (Ashmore 2007). Project excavations also discovered a silted-in river landing facility near the center of the site, just west of Structure 1A-11 (Sharer 1988).

Architecturally, in the Late Classic period Quirigua was laid out as a mirror image of Copan, although its buildings were far smaller (Fig. 1). At its core was a modest Acropolis that eventually comprised 6 superimposed platforms. Its final platform rose only 3.5 m higher than its initial stage,

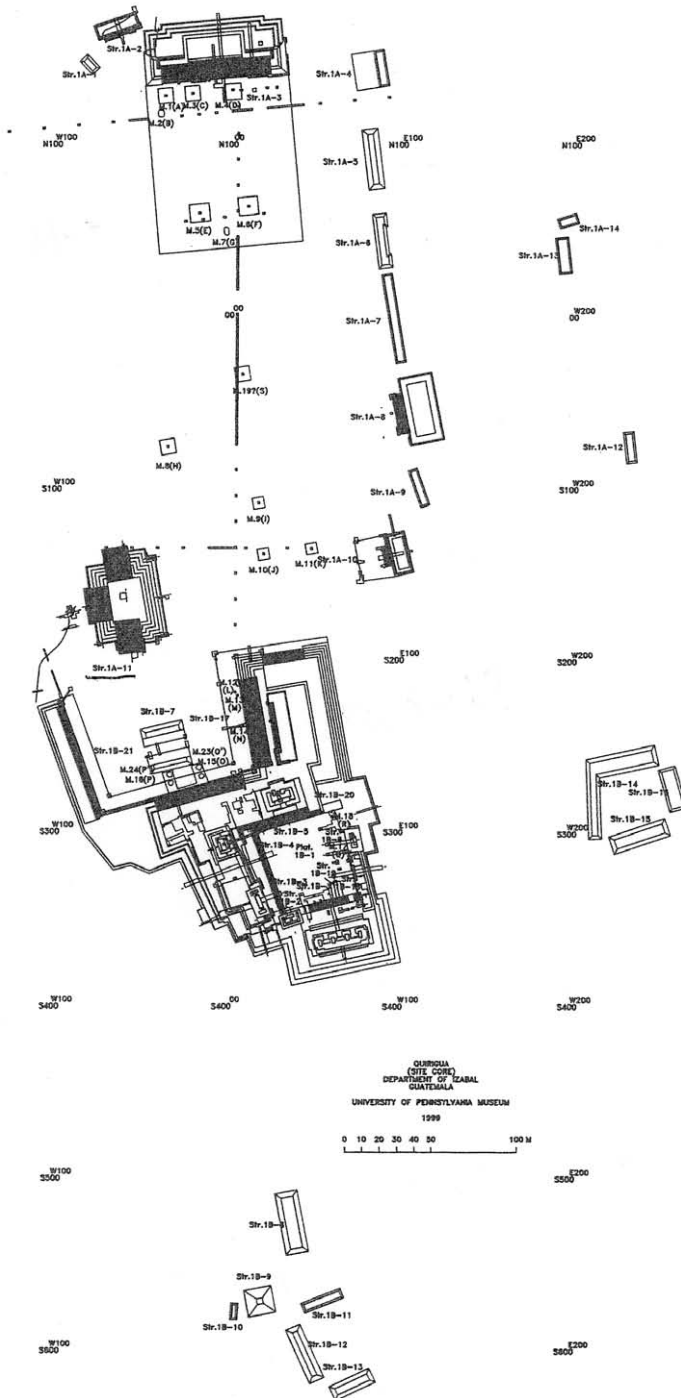


Figure 1. Map of the Main Group at Quirigua, Izabal, Guatemala (Penn Museum Quirigua Project; AutoCAD map by Christopher Jones, from Jones and Sharer in press).

and its area was a third the size of Copan's Acropolis (Jones & Sharer [in press]). Immediately north of the Acropolis is a small Late Classic ball court in a plaza bounded on the north by Quirigua's largest free-standing structure, Structure 1A-11. Quirigua's Great Plaza lies further to the north, which was expanded in the Late Classic to be larger than Copan's Monument Plaza (Sharer 1990).

COPAN IN THE FOUNDING ERA

In the 1990s tunnels excavated by ECAP into the earliest levels of the Copan Acropolis discovered its earliest platform and associated structures, including a central building we nicknamed Hunal (Sharer *et al.* 2004; Sharer *et al.* 1999; Sharer *et al.* 2005; Sedat & López 2004). Hunal has been tentatively identified as the original house of *K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo'* (Sharer 2002; Sharer *et al.* 2005). Excavation beneath the floor of Hunal structure found an intrusive vaulted tomb. The offerings in the Hunal Tomb included a single modest pottery bowl from Quirigua, along with more numerous and elaborate pottery vessels imported from Central Mexico, the central Peten, and highland Guatemala to honor the burial of an elderly male ruler (Reents-Budet *et al.* 2004). His bones sustained multiple combat injuries during his lifetime and his teeth were notched and inlaid with jade disks (Buikstra *et al.* 2004; Sharer 2002). Isotopic analyses, including a new series of samples analyzed in 2009, imply that he was foreign to Copan and that his origins were in the central Maya lowlands of the Peten region of Guatemala (Buikstra *et al.* 2004; Price *et al.* 2010). These findings and other evidence suggest that the remains in the Hunal Tomb are those of the dynastic founder, *K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo'* (Sharer 2002, 2004). There is also circumstantial evidence indicating that the founding event represents a takeover of Copan sponsored by Tikal (Sharer 2003b; 2004).

Over the next 400 years a series of temples oriented to the west and decorated with painted stucco reliefs were built over the Hunal Tomb (Sharer *et al.* 2005). Several of these buildings possess explicit evidence of being dedicated to *K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo'*, and this sequence of funerary temples became a major focus of the entire Acropolis. Sun god masks decorated the western façade of the first funerary temple, constructed over the partially demolished Hunal Structure. The second temple was built over the first and was much larger, but both temples were constructed with Early Classic Peten-style apron moldings (Sharer 2004). Painted plaster panels with full-figure representations of the founder's name, *K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo'*, decorate second temple's western façade (Sharer 2004; Sharer *et al.* 2005). Its substructure contains the elaborate tomb of a royal woman, probably the founder's queen and the mother of Ruler 2 (Bell 2002, 2004; Sharer *et al.* 2005). The best preserved of the founder's funerary temples is the 4th in the series, nicknamed Rosalila, revealed by Ricardo Agurcia's excavations beneath the founder's final funerary temple, Structure 10L-16, built by Copan 16th ruler (Agurcia 1996, 2004).

QUIRIGUA IN THE FOUNDING ERA

Excavations in the Quirigua Acropolis exposed its earliest levels and buildings dating to the founding era of the Copan dynasty, including an earthen substructure similar to the initial earthen structures beneath the Copan Acropolis (Jones & Sharer [in press]; Sharer 2002). This earthen substructure, Structure 1B-6-3rd, is located on the east side of the initial Acropolis Plaza and was part of the earliest platform of the Quirigua Acropolis (Fig. 2), which included 3 known buildings. Structure 1B-6-3rd was constructed directly over the burial of a single adult male placed in a stone-lined crypt (Fig. 3). The buried individual had notched incisors that were inlaid with jade disks, but the only offerings in the crypt were three locally made vessels and a jade mouth bead (Jones & Sharer [in press]; Sharer 1990, 2002). Structure 1B-6-3rd was the first in a series of superimposed structures at this location that culminated in Structure 1B-6, a Late Classic shrine.

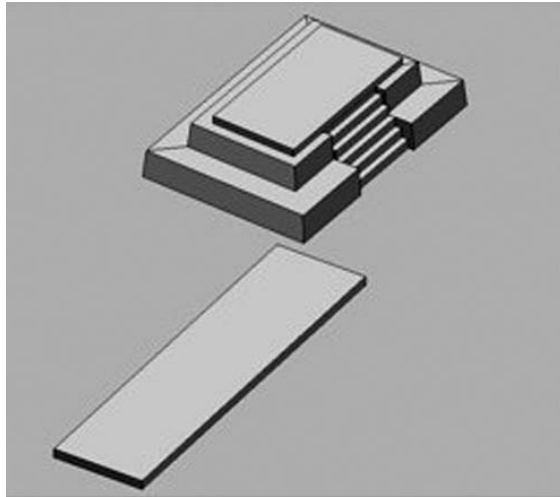


Figure 2. Quirigua Acropolis: Reconstructed view from the southeast of the initial Acropolis platform, ca. AD 450 with the earthen substructure of the earliest “Founder’s Funerary Shrine”, Str. 1B-6-3rd (top) and Str. 1B-18-3rd (below) (Penn Museum Quirigua Project; AutoCAD reconstruction by Federico Paredes U.).

The archaeological evidence indicates the crypt dates to ca. AD 450. Structure 1B-6-3rd and the crypt burial beneath eventually were succeeded by a sequence of four later buildings on the eastern side of the Acropolis Plaza (Jones & Sharer [in press]). At Tikal and other Peten sites this eastern position was often occupied by burials and shrines dedicated to founders of residential groups (Becker 1972). Together this evidence suggests that the crypt burial under Structure 1B-6-3rd was that of the Quirigua Founder, *Tok Casper* (Sharer 2002). The male individuals buried in the Quirigua crypt and Copan’s Hunal Tomb are linked by the fact that both possessed similar notched and jade inlaid teeth (Sharer 2002). Furthermore, both burials were commemorated by a sequence of superimposed funerary temples that span the entire Classic period occupation at both Copan and Quirigua.

SUCCESSORS OF THE FOUNDERS

Little is known about *Tok Casper*’s immediate successors. Quirigua’s eroded Stela U was dedicated by an unidentified ruler associated with an event in AD 480. Titles for the third and fourth rulers survive on the fragmentary Monument 26, dating to AD 493, but their names remain unknown (Looper 2003; Martin & Grube 2008). The pace of construction was slow during the first century after the founding of Quirigua. By ca. AD 550, a new and slightly larger Acropolis platform was built along with new versions of all 3 original buildings and a new freestanding wall on its southern side (Jones & Sharer [in press]).

At Copan, six kings followed *K’inich Yax K’uk’ Mo’* between AD 426 and 534 (Martin & Grube 2008). The evidence indicates the royal center was first laid out at the time of the dynastic founding (Traxler 2004) and by the time of the 8th ruler, *Wi’ Yohl K’inich* (AD 534-551), the overall extent and layout of the Acropolis had been established (Sharer *et al.* 2005). In contrast to Quirigua, construction during this span at Copan was rapid and substantial (Carrelli 2004), creating the first monumental royal Acropolis and reflecting the coalescing of centralized political power during the early dynastic era (Sharer 2002; Sharer *et al.* 2005).

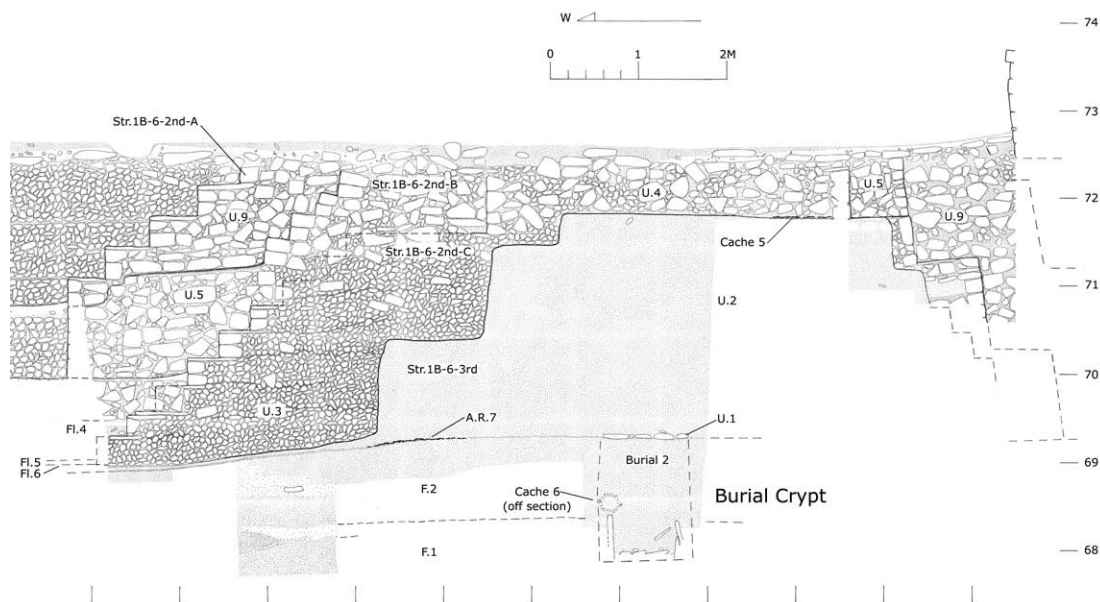


Figure 3. Quirigua Acropolis: Section drawing showing location of the pre-Acropolis crypt burial under Str. 1B-6-3rd (ca. AD 450), the initial building on the eastern side of the Acropolis Plaza, beneath 3 of its 4 later successors (Strs. 1B-6-2nd-A, B, & C) (Penn Museum Quirigua Project; after original drawing by Carl Beetz, from Jones and Sharer in press).

ECAP's excavations in the ancestral East Court of Copan's Acropolis provide additional information that links Copan and Quirigua at the end of the first century of their shared history. Structure 10L-20-2nd was an elaborately decorated building on the eastern side of the court, dedicated by Copan's 8th ruler in ca. AD 542 with a carved hieroglyphic step that records *Wi' Yohl Kinich's* name and his inauguration date (Stuart, personal communication 2001). Excavation across the court west of Structure 10L-20-2nd revealed a slightly later masonry chamber containing an adult male burial laid on a stone platform covered with adornments of jade and shell (Traxler 1994). Informally known as the Sub-Jaguar Tomb, the evidence suggests the burial was that of Copan's eighth king, given its location on the same east-west axis as his building across the court. The ceramic offering vessels in the tomb date to about AD 550 closely matching the 551 date of *Wi' Yohl K'inich's* death recorded on the Hieroglyphic Stairway (Bell *et al.* 2004; Traxler 1994; Stuart, personal communication 2001).

Interestingly, INAA analyses reveal that the majority of the offering vessels from the Sub Jaguar Tomb were manufactured in the Quirigua area (Fig. 4; Reents-Budet *et al.* 2004). The large quantity of Quirigua vessels placed in this tomb is unique at Copan and may reflect a special relationship between the tomb occupant and Quirigua. The isotopic analyses of the bones from the Sub-Jaguar Tomb suggest that the buried individual could have spent his childhood outside of Copan before moving to Copan when he was between 4 and 9 years old (Price *et al.* 2010: 29). Following from this we raise the possibility that prior to becoming Copan's 8th ruler, *Wi' Yohl K'inich* may have resided at Quirigua or otherwise had close ties with Copan's subordinate center in the Motagua Valley. Upon the death of Ruler 8, these close ties may have been responsible for the great number of offering vessels being supplied by Quirigua for *Wi' Yohl K'inich's* funerary rituals and tomb.



Figure 4. Copan Acropolis: Pottery vessels identified by INAA as manufactured at Quirigua excavated from the Sub-Jaguar Tomb, the presumed burial of Copan Ruler 8 *Wi' Yohl K'inich*. Stucco-decorated vessels were likely finished at Copan (Penn Museum Early Copan Acropolis Program; photograph by Robert Sharer).

TWIN DISASTERS

Shortly after the reign of *Wi' Yohl K'inich* there was a destructive event of unknown origin that appears to have targeted Copan's monuments. The temporal pattern of destruction of Copan's monuments suggests a violent episode sometime between AD 554 and 564. Almost every carved monument dedicated before 554-564 was anciently smashed and most are incomplete. Monuments dedicated after this critical decade are generally intact and while most have suffered from the ravages of time, there is little evidence of deliberate damage. The toll includes two fifth century monuments inside the Papagayo Structure excavated under the Hieroglyphic Stairway (Fash 2001; Stuart 2004). Significantly, both monuments were accessible in AD 554-564 and both sustained selective destruction of their glyphic texts (Sharer 2004). Several other Early Classic carved hieroglyphic texts apparently escaped destruction because by this time they were buried beneath subsequent construction. Examples include the Motmot Marker (Fash 2001; Stuart 2004) and the Xukpi Stone (Sharer *et al.* 2005; Stuart 2004). The sixth century hieroglyphic step of Structure 10L-20-2nd also escaped destruction, although the date it was covered by the construction of the final version of the Acropolis East Court is not known for certain. Overall, the evidence reveals that sometime during the 554-564 decade Copan's dynastic monuments and at least two buildings were targets of violent destruction.

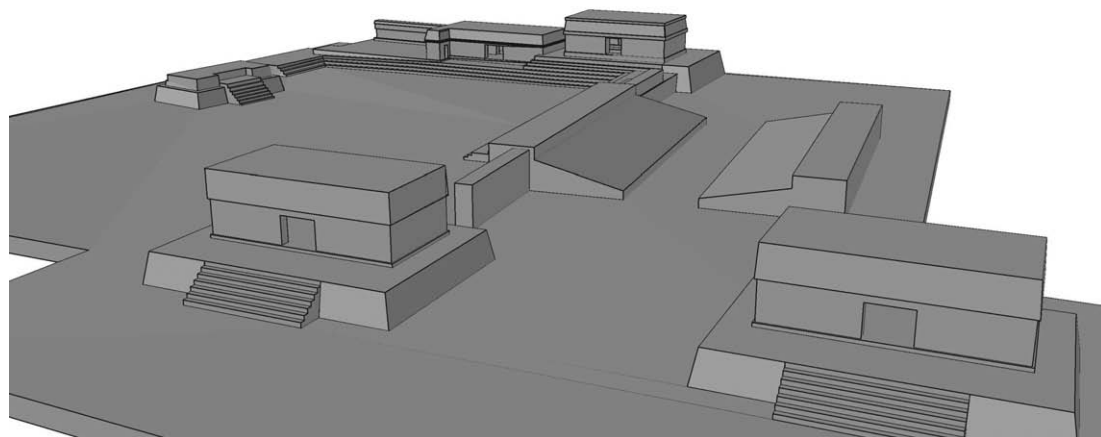


Figure 5. Quirigua Acropolis: Reconstructed view from the northeast of the fourth Acropolis platform, ca. AD 650, surmounted by new buildings following recovery from the “Great Flood,” including the early ball court (right) and the second “Founder’s Funerary Shrine,” Str. 1B-6-2nd-C (left) (Penn Museum Quirigua Project; AutoCAD reconstruction by Federico Paredes U.).

Two further facts may be related to these destructive events. First, the Copan king at the time, the little-known Ruler 9, reigned for only 2 years (AD 551-553), so his apparent premature demise may be related to this episode (Sharer 2004). Second, the destruction at Copan appears very similar to a flurry of monument destruction at Tikal (Jones 1991), which appears to be the result of Tikal’s decisive defeat by the Calakmul alliance in AD 562 (Martin & Grube 2008). However, unlike Calakmul’s victory over Tikal, no historical texts have been discovered that refer to a Copan defeat during the 554-564 decade. Thus the agents responsible for the mid-6th century destruction at Copan remain unknown. But among the possible causes, a violent intrusion into Copan by forces under the direction of Calakmul seems the most likely explanation, since the timing of the destruction at Copan is coincident with the documented victory of the Calakmul alliance over Tikal (Sharer 2004).

Shortly thereafter, sometime around AD 600 Quirigua was inundated by a catastrophic flood (Jones & Sharer [in press]), which not only damaged its buildings, but also deposited a deep layer of silt over the entire site (Ashmore 2007; Sharer 1988). Quirigua’s Late Classic settlement remains are situated on the surface of this flood deposit, which is about 1 m above the level of its Early Classic settlement (Ashmore 2007). Excavations in the site core revealed a remnant of this silt blanket up to 1 m thick along the west side of the Great Plaza. For comparison, a major Motagua flood caused by Hurricane “Mitch” in 1998 left a silt deposit up to 1 m thick in Quirigua’s East Group, which was exposed by the 2009-2010 excavations in this area of the site (Marroquín *et al.* 2011).

RECOVERY

The episode of destruction at Copan apparently occurred early in the reign of its 10th ruler, nicknamed Moon Jaguar (AD 553-578; Martin & Grube 2008), since his first monument, Stela 17 (AD 554), is apparently the latest in the series of smashed Early Classic Copan monuments. Moon Jaguar also appears to have instigated the recovery from this event by dedicating the first monument after the destruction, Stela 9 in AD 564 (Sharer 2004). It is probably significant that Stela 9 was placed outside



Figure 6. Quirigua Altar L, AD 652 with portrait of *K'awiil Yopaat*, the vassal of Copan Ruler 12, *K'ak' Uti' Witz' K'awiil*, who is named in the text on the left margin of the stone (after original drawing by Annie Hunter and Figure 1 in Satterthwaite 1979).

of the Main Group, adjacent to Group 9, which appears to have been the earliest seat of royal power at Copan (Fash & Sharer 1991) and thus an appropriate location to signal the city's rebirth.

It is likely that Copan's recovery was also tied to the revival of its Motagua River port at Quirigua. Not surprisingly, therefore, Quirigua appears to have recovered from the "Great Flood" fairly rapidly, marked by construction projects of unprecedented scale. Excavations also found evidence that the Maya removed the silt deposit from Quirigua's Great Plaza. It is likely that this material was used as construction fill for an expansion of the adjacent Acropolis, which was rebuilt following the flood (Jones & Sharer [in press]). This effort concentrated on bolstering the western flank of the Acropolis, closest to the river. We suspect, but cannot be certain, that this portion of the Acropolis may have been heavily damaged by the Motagua floodwaters. In any case, an extensive new substructure was constructed on the western side of the Acropolis and Quirigua's first ball court was then completed on its summit along with two new buildings in its northwest corner. Structure 1B-1-2 was constructed on the southwest corner, destined to survive as the oldest building still visible today on the Quirigua Acropolis. A new version of the eastern shrine, Structure 1 B-6-2nd, was also in place by this time. As a result of these constructions, Quirigua's Acropolis was completely transformed by ca. AD 650 (Fig. 5).

At Copan recovery continued under its 11th king, *K'ak' Chan Yopaat* (Martin & Grube 2008), formerly known as "Butz Chan." By most assessments Copan reached its apogee of power under its 12th ruler, *K'ak' Uti' Witz' K'awiil* (formerly "Smoke Imix"), whose 67 year reign (AD 628 to 695) was longer than any other Copan king (Andrews & Fash 2005; Martin & Grube 2008). *K'ak' Uti' Witz' K'awiil's* name was recorded at Quirigua on Altar L (Fig. 6), dedicated in AD 652 by his vassal, *K'awiil Yopaat* (Martin & Grube 2008). This is the first known monument dedicated at Quirigua following the Great Flood. Given its round shape, Altar L actually may be a marker originally created for the western ball court. If that was the case, it survived the ball court's termination and burial under



Figure 7. Quirigua Stela D, dedicated in AD 766 with portrait of its sponsor, *K'ak' Tiliw Chan Yopaat*, who led Quirigua to victory and independence from Copan in AD 738 (after original photograph by Alfred P. Maudslay and Figure 14 in Sharer 1990).

later buildings on the western side of the Acropolis. In any case, it appears that Altar L celebrated Quirigua's recovery from the catastrophic flood, while at the same time acknowledging the subordinate status of its ruler within the Copan kingdom.

BREAKUP OF THE COPAN KINGDOM

Ruler 12's son, *Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil*, became Copan's 13th king in AD 695. Later in his reign (AD 724) *Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil* installed a new subordinate ruler at Quirigua, *K'ak' Tiliw Chan Yopaat* (Fig. 7). But it appears that Copan's new vassal had no intention of maintaining Quirigua's vassalage to its larger southern neighbor. As many of his later monuments proclaim, on April 29, AD 738 *K'ak' Tiliw Chan Yopaat* defeated Copan, captured and subsequently beheaded *Waxaklajuun Ub'aah K'awiil*. These events dramatically ended 300 years of Copan's hegemony in

the southeast Maya region. As a result, Quirigua became an independent Maya kingdom and its king, *K'ak' Tiliw Chan Yopaat*, now could directly control the revenues from the Motagua trade network. It is also apparent that he retained for his own use all the labor and tribute previously siphoned off to Copan (Sharer 1988, 1991).

Archaeology shows that Quirigua's population was about 10 times smaller than Copan (Ashmore 2007), so how had Quirigua defeated its far larger and more powerful capital? The answer probably lies in the establishment of a new alliance between *K'ak' Tiliw Chan Yopaat* and the much larger kingdom of Calakmul. The text on Quirigua Stela I relates that in AD 736, some 2 years before its victory over Copan, Quirigua hosted a visit by *Wamaw K'awiil* the king of Calakmul (Looper 2003). Although the evidence is circumstantial, it is highly likely that Calakmul supported Quirigua against Copan, and probably provided the decisive manpower needed to defeat its former overlord. Calakmul's motives seem obvious: by ending Copan's control over Quirigua, Calakmul probably gained access to the bounty of the Motagua trade route. In addition, by defeating Copan, Calakmul struck a blow against its greatest enemy, Tikal, one of Copan's oldest allies (Sharer 2004).

With its dramatic strike against Copan the independent capital of Quirigua was transformed by its newly acquired wealth and prestige (Sharer 1988, 1990). Quirigua's Acropolis was expanded with far larger buildings befitting the seat of a new royal capital. An expanded public plaza was created to become one of the largest such public spaces ever designed for a Classic Maya capital (Fig. 1), the setting for the new monuments proclaiming the triumph of *K'ak' Tiliw Chan Yopaat* (Fig. 7). As the Motagua flowed along the western flank of Quirigua's royal Acropolis and Great Plaza, the growing array of *K'ak' Tiliw's* portraits on the largest stelae ever dedicated by a Maya king were visible to all the traffic on the river (Sharer 1990).

At the same time, as a result of defeat and the loss of its king, Copan's prestige and power was devastated. We can safely assume that the labor and tribute once provided by Quirigua vanished, along with Copan's revenue from the Motagua trade network. The texts on Quirigua's new stelae even proclaimed that its king was the 14th successor of the founder of Copan's ruling dynasty, *K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo'* (Looper 2003; Sharer 1990).

Although a new ruler was inaugurated at Copan, his lessened power is indicated by the fact that he dedicated no royal monuments during a reign of over a decade (AD 738-749). Only one new building was constructed on Copan's Acropolis during this span. Structure 10L-22A has been identified as the *Popol Nah* where the lords of Copan's elite houses met to advise the king (Andrews & Fash 2005; Fash 2001). Power sharing by the highest elite, while difficult to demonstrate archaeologically, could account for the expansion of Copan's elite residential compounds from this time onward. It is certainly significant that for the first time in Copan's history the houses of these secondary lords included elaborately carved benches with texts recording their titles and growing prestige (Fash 2001).

THE LAST DAYS OF COPAN AND QUIRIGUA

Copan's prestige was revived for a time by the efforts of its 15th ruler, *K'ak' Yipyaj Chan K'awiil* (749-763). This was dramatically symbolized by the rebuilding of the final version of Copan's Hieroglyphic Stairway, proclaiming the long history of the dynasty of *K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo'* (Fash 2002). But archaeology testifies that Copan's final kings never regained all the power that had been lost to their subordinate nobles in the wake of Quirigua's victory (Andrews & Fash 2005; Fash 2001; Martin & Grube 2008).

The 16th ruler of Copan, *Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat* (763-ca. 820) attempted to continue the efforts of his predecessor. With Altar Q and Temple 16 he dedicated the two final monuments to the legacy

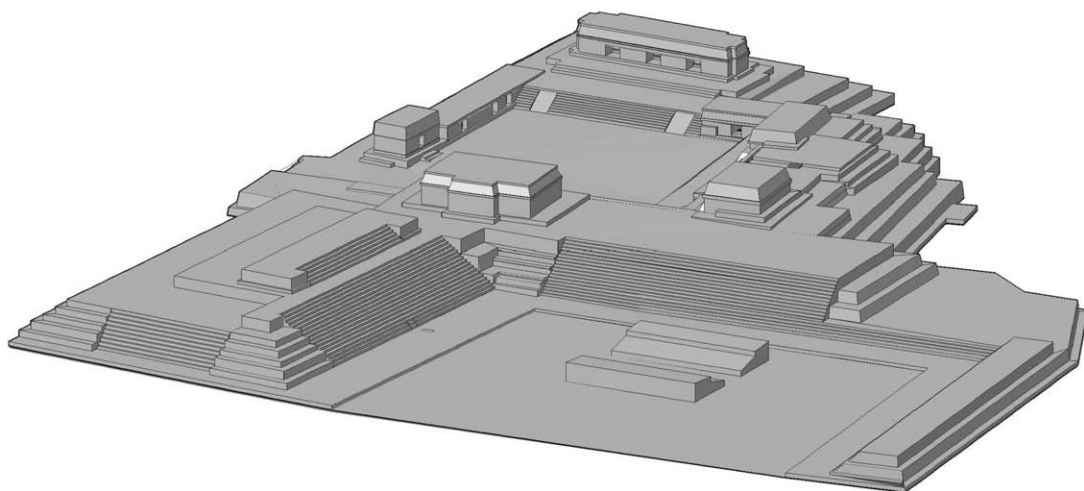


Figure 8. Quirigua Acropolis: Reconstructed view from the northwest of the final platform, ca. AD 810, as it appeared during the reign of the last known Quirigua ruler, “Jade Sky” (Penn Museum Quirigua Project; AutoCAD reconstruction by Federico Paredes U.).

of the founder of Copan’s royal dynasty, *K’inich Yax K’uk’ Mo’*, four centuries before (Andrews & Fash 2005; Martin & Grube 2008). Yet *Yax Pasaj* could only maintain his power and the loyalty of his nobles by granting his subordinates increased authority, as he presented them with more titles and greater status. This meant that *Yax Pasaj*’s power was weakened over time and the labor and resources he commanded began to melt away. His two greatest buildings were constructed early in his reign, but both were poorly constructed likely due to shortages of labor. Significantly, *Yax Pasaj* did not dedicate any large buildings or monuments in the final decades of his rule (Andrews & Fash 2005; Fash 2001).

At the same time the rulers of Quirigua continued to control the jade route between the Maya highlands and the Caribbean, and the agricultural bounty of the Motagua Valley. After a reign of 60 years the architect of Quirigua’s victory over Copan, *K’ak’ Tiliw Chan Yopaat*, died in AD 785. His successor is known as Sky Xul, the king portrayed on the beautifully carved Zoomorph P, which records the founding of Quirigua under the auspices of *K’inich Yax K’uk’ Mo’* almost four hundred years earlier (Looper 2003; Martin & Grube 2008). During his reign, and that of his successor, construction further expanded the Quirigua Acropolis (Jones & Sharer [in press]; Sharer 1988, 1990).

A new king nicknamed Jade Sky succeeded Sky Xul in about AD 800. Jade Sky sponsored the construction of the final and largest Acropolis platform, which included two of the largest buildings at Quirigua (Fig. 8). In AD 810 Jade Sky hosted the ceremonies marking the 9.19.0.0 K’atun ending, which apparently were held at Quirigua rather than Copan. As recorded by the carved texts on the newly dedicated Acropolis Structure 1B-1, *Yax Pasaj* apparently attended the ceremonies with the Quirigua ruler (Martin & Grube 2008; Sharer 1990). The reconciliation of the kings of Copan and Quirigua signaled by this event was likely motivated by a common need to unite against the increasing threats to their power. For by 810 a growing number of Classic Maya kingdoms had fallen or were in serious decline.

ABANDONMENT

Despite their efforts the kings of Copan and Quirigua ultimately failed to preserve their power and prestige. The end of dynastic rule came to both capitals soon thereafter, dramatically reflected by Copan's last known monument, Altar L (Fash 2001). It portrays Yax Pasaj seated opposite *Ukit Took'*, who in AD 822 attempted to become Copan's 17th ruler. But the best-laid plans of *Ukit Took'* were never realized, for the carved text and scenes on Altar L were left unfinished. Some traditional authority was maintained at Copan for a few years, divided among its noble houses, before these elite survivors lost the remaining support of their rapidly dwindling populations (Fash 2001).

After the end of dynastic rule both Copan and Quirigua were deserted. At both sites archaeology has discovered evidence of brief reoccupations by new peoples who left behind distinctive pottery and artifacts (Fash *et al.* 2004; Sharer 1985b). At Quirigua these final inhabitants probably sought to revitalize the Motagua trade route, but in the end they failed, as did similar efforts at Copan. Thus Copan and Quirigua were abandoned for a final time and a resurgent tropical forest soon reclaimed both cities.

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