


The Wonders of Copan at the Penn Museum

ON MY VISIT TO Copan last summer to attend a meeting dedicated to the Penn Museum's *MAYA 2012: Lords of Time* exhibition, I fell in love with this place and the country. Copan is Honduras's spiritual capital—a blissful place with magnificent monuments set in a glorious tropical valley, maintained to standards that are truly world class. Its centerpiece, the Hieroglyphic Stairway, is a sculptured library ascending a pyramid, one of the great archaeological treasures of the world. Copan master builders, as the Stairway shows, were the equal of any from ancient Greece or Renaissance Florence. Indeed, the site museum is a treasure trove for those fascinated by the work of Maya artisans. Absent from this museum, though, are the feast of objects found accompanying the royal families interred within Copan's pyramids. These particular treasures—known from *National Geographic's* sumptuous coverage of the Penn Museum's excavations conducted in collaboration with the Honduran Institute of Anthropology and History and Harvard's Peabody Museum—are well worthy of a pharaoh. *MAYA 2012: Lords of Time* aims to introduce these discoveries to an American audience. Penn Museum's exhibition (May 5, 2012, through January 13, 2013) couples an exploration of the debate about the Maya apocalypse with cases filled with the majestic accoutrements of Copan's royal lineages. It is a unique opportunity, thanks to the wonderful cooperation of the Honduran Government, to see a major collection of more than 75 treasures—many of them never seen outside of Honduras—trophies worthy of the architects of this great city. Our exhibition also aims to promote Copan as a UNESCO World Heritage Site that has a genuinely commanding presence on the world stage. The intimate drama of the possible end of the world together with the story of these peerless treasures brings a remarkable civilization to life. 



In August 2011, the Advisory Committee for the *MAYA 2012: Lords of Time* exhibition met at the Institute Research Center at Copán Ruinas, Honduras. The Committee stands in front of a full-size replica of a Copan stela. From left to right: Loa Traxler, Richard Hodges, Barbara W. Fash, Salvador Varela, Ricardo Agurcia, Eva Lilia Martínez Ordóñez, William L. Fash, Jr., Dorie Reents-Budet, Norman Martínez, and Kathleen Quinn.

Many of the objects in the *MAYA 2012: Lords of Time* exhibition (and featured in this issue of *Expedition*) come from the recent excavations at Copan, Honduras. These excavations were initiated by the Copan Acropolis Archaeological Project conceived by William L. Fash, Jr. (Harvard University) as a consortium of research institutions working cooperatively to investigate and preserve the Acropolis of this UNESCO World Heritage Site under the auspices of the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia. Penn Museum's Early Copan Acropolis Program was an important part of this work from 1989 to 2003, along with allied programs from the Peabody Museum of Harvard University, Tulane University, and the Copan Association in Honduras.

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