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LADB Staff

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## Important New Discoveries At Copan, Honduras

*by LADB Staff*

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Honduran and Japanese archeologists have discovered 30 new structures and the remains of 69 Mayans at Honduras' famed Copan archeological site. Project director Seiichi Nakamura said the structures are from the early classical period, 300-600 A.D., and from the late classical, 600-900 A.D. It is believed that Copan was abandoned after 900 A.D. because of overpopulation. The human remains were estimated to be 1,450 years old, putting the people in walking-around condition at about 550 A.D.

Also found, according to Nakamura, were offerings in and around the burial sites and very valuable artifacts near the remains of a 12-year-old child, indicating the child was a member of Copan high society.

This is not Nakamura's first great find at Copan. In 2000 his team discovered a tomb filled with jade offerings and painted ceramics. He was surprised at that discovery because it was in an area thought to have no pre-Hispanic remains. The reason for the find was that he was doing test excavations prior to the building of a road linking the Copan ruins with El Florido on the Guatemalan border. Copan lies just inside Honduras, and Guatemalans are the most frequent tourists to the ruins.

Most impressive among the artifacts at the 2000 site were two large jade pectorals, one almost 24 cm long with the image of a god in the early classic style, the other carved with a design indicating that the tomb's occupant was a ruler. The importance of this, said the scientist, was that, "if a king or queen's tomb was placed outside of the acropolis, it would require us to rethink our traditional interpretations of the sociopolitical organization of Copan. This discovery could possess huge significance for all studies of Maya occupation at the site."

Further investigation led to the opinion that the tomb was that of a king, making him the eighth of Copan's 16 kings to have been discovered. It might have been paved over. The 2000 discovery halted the road building and might thereby have prevented this latest from being lost under the hard crust of development.

The new find is located near the entrance to the Grupo Principal where, said Carmen Julia Fajardo of the Instituto Hondureno de Antropologia e Historia (IHAAH), "a group of high-ranking people lived, with homes joined by courtyards, and the quantity of offerings that have been found is incredible."

Nakamura said of the 69 human remains, "We believe these remains belong to the families of the tenth Maya ruler, Luna Jaguar." The artifacts included more than 450 vessels, jade musical instruments, stones, conchas, and ceramics. The new site will not be open to tourists until 2007. It will take that long to restore the buildings.

Since 1998, Japan has spent US\$4.1 million on Copan archeological projects. Copan, 305 km west of Tegucigalpa, flourished between 250 A.D. and 900 A.D. It was part of a Mayan empire that stretched across southern Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras.

Historians believe that the first reports of the existence of Copan were from Diego Garcia de Palacios, a representative of King Felipe II of Spain, who wrote to the crown of the site on March 8, 1576. In the 1840s, US explorers John L. Stephens and Frederick Catherwood brought Copan to international prominence.

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