

El Puente and Copan: From the seventh to the eighth century of the Southeastern Maya Periphery

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El Puente and Copan: From the seventh to the eighth century of the Southeastern Maya Periphery

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El Puente is one of the largest pre-Columbian sites in the La Entrada region in the Copan Department, Western Honduras (Figure 1). From the Copan Valley eastward, crossing a watershed, one enters the Florida Valley. El Puente is about 50 km from the famous Copan ruins, the capital of an important kingdom of Classic Maya. About 2 km north of the confluence of the Chamelecon and Chinamito Rivers, more than 150 structures have been confirmed in an area 850 m east to west and 790 m north to south. The site's Main Group is roughly 200 m east to west and 100 m north to south, with many square and long rectangular structures surrounding some plazas (Figure 2). Among them, a 15-meter-high pyramid, Structure 1, and another 5.5-meter-high pyramid, Structure 31, are outstanding. Intensive excavations and restoration work were conducted from 1991 to 1995. The site has been converted into the second national archaeological park in Honduras.

The La Entrada region comprises the Florida Valley and the adjacent La Venta Valley. The former extends northward, and

the latter eastward. Further north of the Florida Valley, the route crosses the watershed that is now the Honduras–Guatemala border and reaches the Lower Motagua Valley. Further east from the La Venta Valley, it goes through the Quimistan Valley, Naco Valley, Sula Plain, and Comayagua Valley in Central Honduras. The Florida and La Venta Valleys together have an area of about 140 square kilometers, which is large compared to the Copan Valley, which has an area of 26 square kilometers.

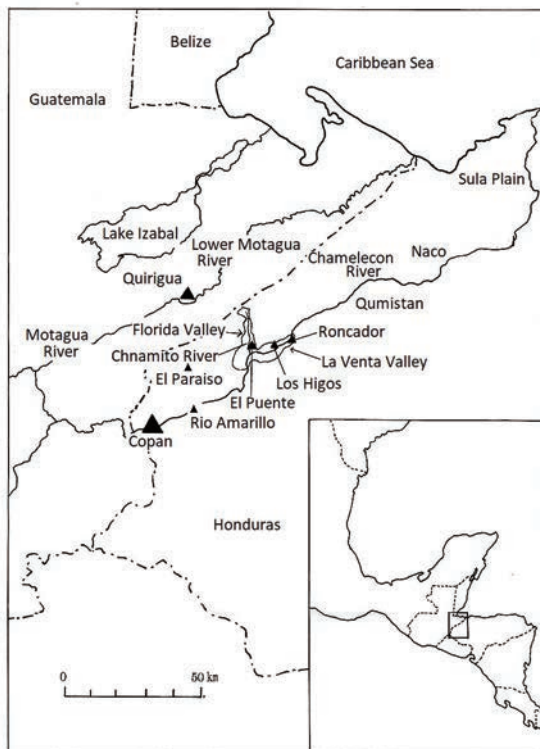


Figure 1 Southeastern Maya Periphery

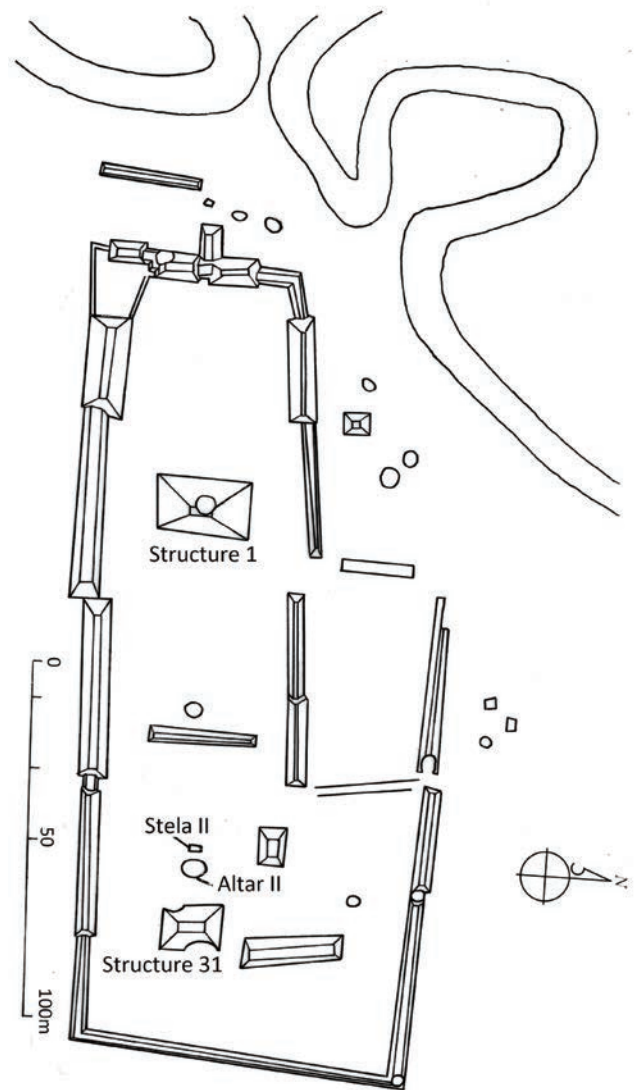


Figure 2 Main Group, El Puente

In the La Venta Valley, Los Higos and Roncador are the two most prominent archaeological sites along the Chamelecon River. At Los Higos, a stela with Maya inscriptions dated 781 was discovered in the early 20th century [Nakamura 1991:208; Schele 1991]. No stone monuments with Maya inscriptions are reported east from this point. The other principal site, Roncador, is located on the La Venta Valley's eastern edge and has the only known ball court in the La Entrada region [Nakamura et al. 1991:35].

Further east from La Venta Valley, down the Chamelecon River, the sites consist of mounds, at best, 2–3 m high. The architecture is piled-up cobbles and other natural materials. The structures do not surround a square plaza but are irregularly arranged or in a linear pattern.

Only 50 kilometers eastward from Copan, the Maya cultural elements, such as inscriptions, disappear. Furthermore, 10 kilometers east of there, the Mesoamerican elements, such as the cut stone masonry and the site plan in which structures surround the square plaza, also fade out.

In Copan, Yax Kuk Mo founded a dynasty in AD 427, which lasted for about 400 years until its collapse in the early 9th century. In the 7th and 8th centuries, Copan reached its apogee but then suffered defeats and the demise of its king. What were the interests of the Copan kingdom in the land of the east in this period? Who were the people who built El Puente? What kind of interaction did Copan and their eastern neighbors have? This paper focuses mainly on the excavation results at El Puente and considers the relationship between Copan and the Florida Valley.

EXCAVATIONS OF STRUCTURE 31 AND VISITOR CENTER, EL PUENTE

Structure 31 was the second-tallest mound of El Puente [Hasegawa 1993]. After the excavation and restoration, it turned out to be a three-story pyramid with a plan of approximately 18 x 26 m and a height of 5.5 m in its final phase (Figures 3 and 4). In addition, there is a monolith (Stela II) and an altar (Altar II) on its front or west side. The tunnel excavation revealed that its construction sequence could be divided into six phases ("Str. 31-1" the last and "Str. 31-6" the oldest). We also excavated around Altar II and detected two construction stages and the terrace, on top of which the Stela II is erected (Figure 5). In the excavation process, we learned about the sequential relationship between each construction phase of Structure 31, Altar II, Stela II, and the terrace (Figure 6).

No diagnostic ceramic type from the Late Classic Period was found in the early phases. So, the construction probably

began before AD 700, though this is uncertainly established. The absence of Fine Oranges suggests this structure was abandoned before AD 900.

As to the architectural style, it should be noted that although this structure is a stepped pyramid of cut stones in its final phase, like those of Classic Maya, that was not the case from its beginning. Only after the fourth phase of construction (Str.31-3) is the Copan-Maya-style pyramid built with a stucco floor. Considering that the fifth phase (Str.31-2) is an extension of the first stair of the platform and that the final sixth (Str.31-1) is merely the addition of four small staircases, it can be considered the last one of the four phases. The older structures inside were pulled down, probably to reuse the stone material. Only a few inferior courses of masonry remained, there was no plaster floor trace, and the scale and overall appearance of Structure 31 at early phases are unknown.

Notably, even in the final phase, when the structure had achieved the Copan-Maya architectural style, the building on top of the pyramid was not entirely made of stone. It was far from having wall decorations like stone carvings. We could confirm that the masonry is only up to about 70 cm. Corbel stones, a characteristic of Maya architecture, were not found, suggesting that the upper part of the walls and the roof were made of organic materials. Much burned clay with a flat surface on one side and imprints of plant stems or grass on the opposite side was

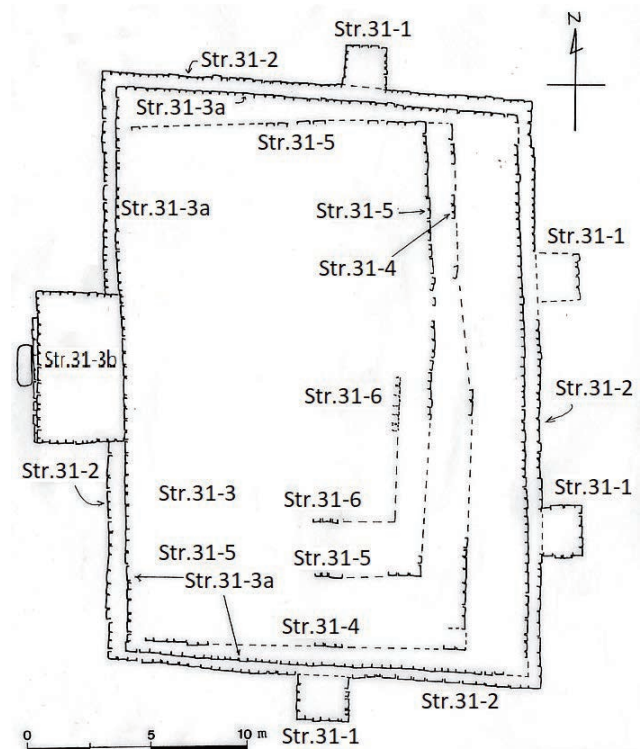


Figure 3 Plan, Structure 31, El Puente

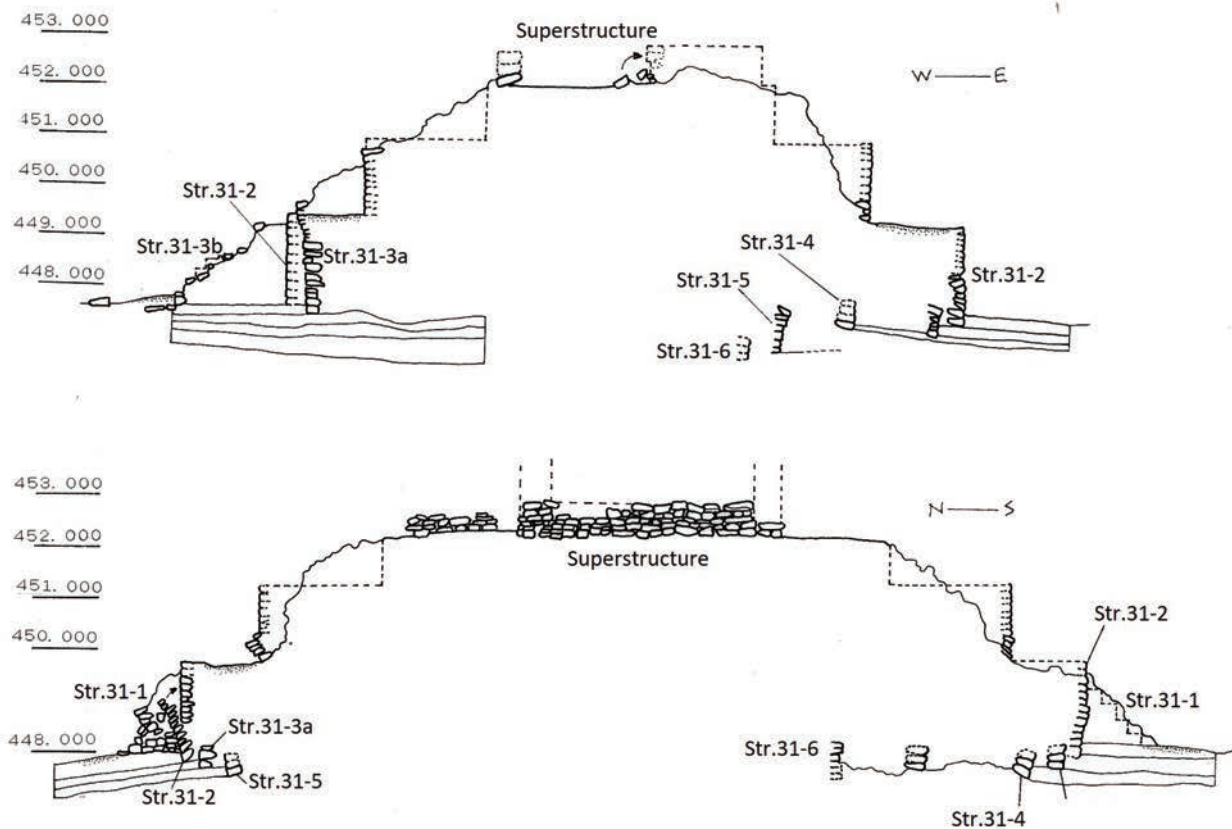


Figure 4 Cross Sections, Structure 31, El Puente

scattered in the area surrounding Structure 31. The wattle and daub building above the structure had been burned off for some reason, and its debris had accumulated.

As mentioned above, Structure 31 has accompanying Stela II and Altar II (Figures 5). These stone monuments are Classic Maya elements. However, Stela II has no carvings except for faint red pigment traces on the surface. So, actually, it should be called a monolith built on a terrace. Altar II is not carved out of a large stone like those of Copan but is a masonry of cut stones. Such an altar or terrace is found at Cerro Palenque in the Sula Plain, far east of the Maya area [Joyce 1991:48–51]. Moreover, these monuments were built in sequence, and Altar II has two building stages. It should be noted that this type of stone monument is quite different from the altars of Copan.

Around Structure 31, good stratigraphical data on ceramics has been obtained due to the overlapping layers formed by floor renewals. These materials show that the lower layers are dominated by local potteries of the Florida Valley, while in the upper layers, Copan-Maya types increase. Also, many incense burner fragments with thorn-shaped prongs were recovered, which, together with the “stela”-altar complex, suggests this structure’s

function. The pottery will be discussed more later.

Finally, test pit excavations were conducted before constructing the archaeological park’s visitor center located some 500 meters southeast of the Main Group of El Puente [Hasegawa and Varela 1993]. Some ceramic sherds of mammiform support recovered in this survey can date from Late Preclassic to Early Classic Period, indicating human occupation at El Puente before AD 400, which is long before the construction of Structure 31 began. Their descendants, local people of the Florida Valley with different cultural affiliation from the Maya, possibly started to build the Main Group of the site.

EXCAVATION OF STRUCTURE 1, EL PUENTE

Here we overview the excavation of Structure 1, El Puente’s largest pyramid [Terasaki 1996]. In keeping with the purpose of this paper, to discuss the beginning of Main Group’s construction, the following description focuses on the oldest phase of this structure.

Structure 1, the largest mound of El Puente with 15-meter height, turned out to be a six-story pyramid with a plan of about 27 x 19 m and a height of 12 m with the debris of its superstruc-

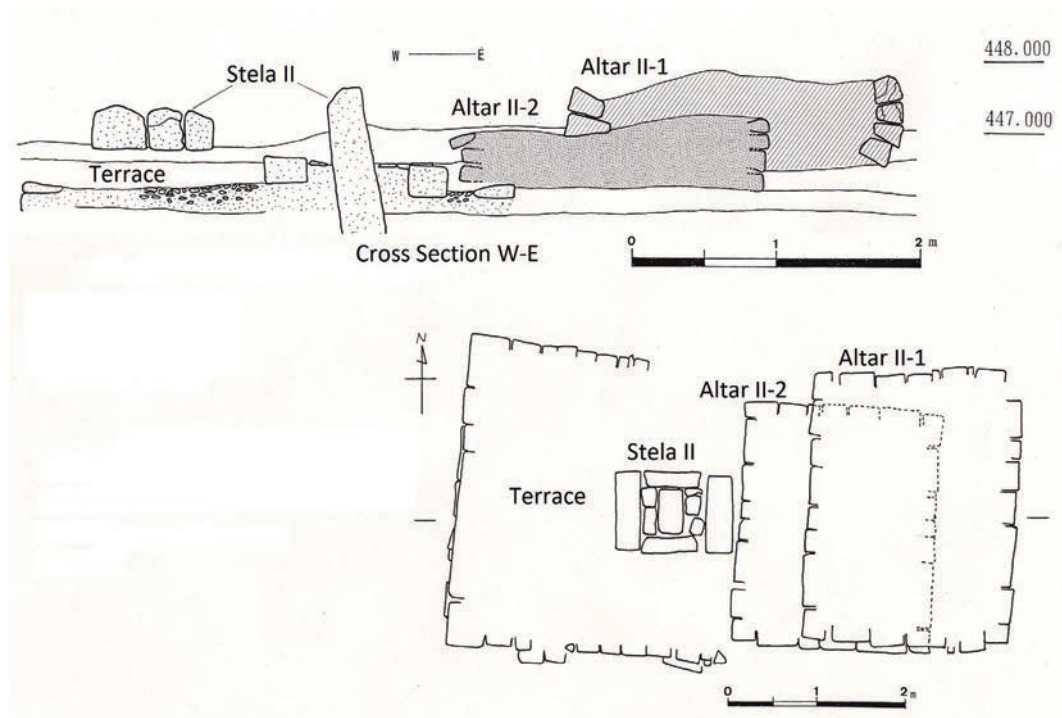


Figure 5 Cross Section and Plan, Stela II, Altar II and Terrace, Structure 31, El Puente

ture, including corbel stones. The structure's interior was also investigated to search for its earliest phase (hereafter abbreviated as "Phase 6"), and a burial ("Tomb 3") was found inside. It has a plan of about 16 x 8 m and is characterized by the coarsely worked stone, hard fine construction fill, and clay overlay on the exterior wall surfaces. The superstructure is surrounded by walls on all sides and has two entrances. According to the investigators, this platform is similar to Chorchá, the 7th century Copan architecture.

Around Tomb 3, some funerary goods possibly associated with it were found. Among them, the lid of an incense burner with human effigy is impressively similar to those recovered from Burial XXXVII-4, a royal tomb discovered inside Chorchá [Fash 2001: 109]. In addition to the architectural resemblance, the ceramic sherds collected from the fill of this earliest structure include a certain amount of Copan-polychromes.

Based on these findings, Nakamura [1995:4, 8] suggests that the sudden appearance of Copan-like architecture at El Puente in the 7th century was not an imitation by the locals. Instead, this reflects the Copan dynasty's colonial policy for dominating the Florida Valley through the enclave. In charge of the investigation, Terasaki [1998:76] states that Phase 6 was constructed by a group strongly affiliated with Copan.

EL PUENTE AND COPAN

The investigation of Structures 1 and 31 generated two conflict-

ing hypotheses. One says a long-established indigenous group initiated El Puente's construction. The other says this was due to Copan's direct intervention.

Did Copan-Maya-like architecture "suddenly" appear?

No traces corresponding to the old occupation of El Puente's surrounding parts were found in the Main Group. That the earliest phase of Structure 1 has Copan-Maya elements may suggest a disconnect between the beginning of the construction of the Main Group and the older, presumably non-Maya, inhabitants.

A question remains whether Phase 6 is the oldest structure in the Main Group, El Puente. Since this was unearthed at the largest pyramid's deepest part and was built on the river sediment, this structure might be the oldest. However, the possibility of having even earlier structures inside cannot be ignored because the tunnel was not completely excavated [Terasaki 1996: 28–34].

Together with Phase 6, a candidate for the Main Group's earliest construction is Str. 31-6 (Figures 3 and 4). In this case, it must be the oldest of Structure 31 because the tunnel was bored through Str. 31-6 in the east-west direction along its central axis, and no traces of construction were found inside. The chronological relationship between Phase 6 and Str. 31-6 is unknown. We could not find the sequential relationship between both pyramids stratigraphically. They are more than 100 m apart, and the soil layers between them are very shallow and unclear.

Notably, while some pottery sherds were recovered in the Phase 6 fill, none were found inside Str.31-6. Their presence in-

dicates human activity before Phase 6 that resulted in depositing these artifacts. In this regard, Str.31-6 may be older.

The author once saw Phase 6 when visiting El Puente in 1994. It can be said that, at first glance, the stones of Phase 6 have faces, though roughly worked. On the other hand, Str.31-6 is the masonry of rubbles with no processing trace, indicating different architectural techniques. In addition, Phase 6's fill is made of "fine and compact clay" with no gravel mixed in [Terasaki 1998:75]. In contrast, the fill of Str.31-6 is also without stones, but it is not particularly refined compared to later construction phases. The fine clay overlaid on the walls of Phase 6 was not detected in Str.31-6. The only similarity between the two constructions may be the pavement stone slabs around the structure.

In fact, Phase 6 is similar to Copan's 7th century architecture. However, Str.31-6, which is as old or possibly older, has different architectural features. We can not conclude that Copan-like architecture suddenly appeared at El Puente. Perhaps diverse architectural styles existed early in the Main Group's construction sequence.

Ceramics from the early phases of Structure 1 and Structure 31

Among the 4,505 sherds collected from Phase 6's construction fill, 383 were fine ceramics, and 88 were Copan-type painted potteries [Terasaki 1996: 50–61]. This could suggest that the Main Group's construction was abruptly initiated by Copan mi-

grants.

Meanwhile, the potteries collected from the area surrounding Structure 31 present different aspects. Two ceramic types drew our attention. These are Colinas Brown and Entrada Micaceous, both with distinctive pastes. Colinas Brown comprises large jars and bowls with thick walls of a sandy but compact orange-to-brown paste with inclusions of 2–3 mm pebbles [Sato 1991a: 4, 1993:23]. This pottery is abundant in the northeastern La Venta Valley and the northern Florida Valley. It is also present in the Lower Motagua Valley and is called Vitales Thick-Walled [Schortman 1984:476–478]. The other type, Entrada Micaceous, is jars with brown paste with a high amount of mica fragments [Sato 1991a: 4–5, 1993:23–24]. It is found throughout the Florida Valley and is called Mojanal Micaceous in the Lower Motagua Valley [Schortman 1984:464–474]. They both date from the Late Classic Period in the La Entrada area.

According to the preliminary analysis of the ceramic samples recovered around Stela II and Altar II by the author, Vitales Thick-Wall is abundant in Levels 6 to 8, accounting for over 10% of the rim sherds. These layers correspond to Str. 31-3, Str. 31-4, the early construction of Altar II, Stela II, and its terrace (Figure 6). Later, its percentage goes decreasing at the upper layers. Meanwhile, the polychromes, many of which are Copan types like Copador or Gualpopa, also begin to appear from Level 6, but they account for less than 5% of the rim sherds. Later, in Level 3, the construction fill under the floor surface of the final phase, they reach over 5% of the rim sherds and arrive at the

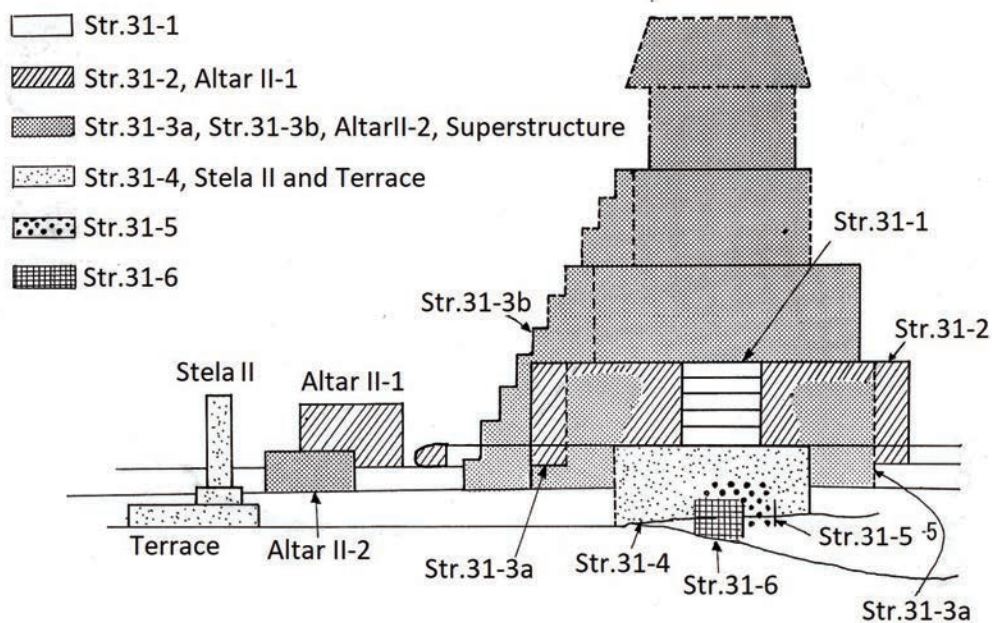


Figure 6 Construction Sequence, Structure 31, Stela II, Altar II and Terrace, El Puente

highest rate, more than 10%, in Level 1, the soil deposited above the last floor surface. In addition, Entrada Micaceous continues to be found from the lower to the upper levels consistently in constant quantity.

It is important to note that Colinas Brown and Entrada Micaceous are non-Maya ceramic types. The former is distributed somewhat exclusively with Tango Brown, which is similar to Zico, a domestic ceramic type of Copan [Sato 1991a:13]. The latter, a common type in the Florida Valley, represents more than half of the ceramics collected in the Lower Motagua Valley [Schortman 1984:464–474].

In the same El Puente Main Group, while Copan-polychromes are found in the earliest Structure 1 construction, non-Maya local potteries are dominant in the early stages of Structure 31. The following hypotheses are possible for this inconsistency: 1) A chronological difference exists. Structure 31's early stages predate Phase 6. 2) The people who built Structures 1 and 31 belonged to two groups with different cultural affiliations. 3) Different socioeconomic groups occupied Structures 1 and 31. Therefore, the potteries' differences reflect the groups' activities, economic wealth, or both. Before we discuss this further, let us look at another issue.

Phase 6 and Chorcha

The earliest construction of Structure 1, Phase 6, is reportedly similar to Chorcha, the temple interred in Temple 10L-26 of Copan, in which Burial XXXVII-4 of the twelfth king was discovered [Fash 2001:111].

Again, these are the similarities: the relatively rough stonework, the fine and compact construction fill, and the walls overlain with clay. In particular, a ceramic effigy, the lid of a censer with a human figure with a turban headdress, possibly associated with Tomb 3, is impressively similar to those of Burial XXXVII-4.

Nevertheless, comparing Phase 6, Chorcha, and the burials made in them, there are also some differences. Phase 6 has a plan of 8 x 16 m. Chorcha is 11 x 30 m on the top surface, and its base shape is unknown but is likely much larger. Regarding their superstructures, Phase 6 has a touring wall, while Chorcha has 16 columns. Moreover, the contrast becomes even more significant when we compare the burials. They are entirely different in shape and scale. Tomb 3 is a direct interment within the structure. On the other hand, Burial XXXVII-4 is a masonry chamber covered with 11 massive capstones. Moreover, there is a stark disparity in the burial offerings' quality and quantity. Tomb 3 has two vessels, a shell necklace, and a ceramic effigy figure. Burial

XXXVII-4 is much more sumptuous, associated with more than 60 vessels, 25 strombus shells, 25 jades, and many censers, including 11 with human effigies.

Even though building techniques were introduced from Copan to El Puente in the 7th century, Phase 6 and Chorcha are strikingly different.

COMPARING THE LA VENTA VALLEY AND FLORIDA VALLEY

In Copan, rapid population growth began around AD 600–650 in the reign of the eleventh king or his successor [Webster and Freter 1990:53]. Therefore, the Copan might have sought new colonies in the Florida Valley, the La Venta Valley, or both to decrease population pressure and secure trade routes to the east. Copan's Stela P of AD 623, erected by the eleventh king, has a glyph that appears to be Los Higos [Schele 1991:210]. It is speculated that Copan and the La Venta Valley could have already had a close relationship in the 7th century.

On the other hand, in the Florida Valley, we have repeatedly observed Copan-Maya elements at El Puente, such as the architectural techniques, effigy figure, and painted ceramics of Phase 6. All these similarities are between Phase 6 and Chorcha. Buried in the latter is the twelfth king, who reigned for more than 60 years, under whom the Copan Kingdom increased its power enormously. It is possible that during his reign, Copan expanded its influence to the Florida Valley and established an enclave.

Nevertheless, there are other aspects like the different architectural styles of Str. 31-6, a monolith (Stela II), and Altar II, similar to those of the non-Maya region, and indigenous ceramic types of the Florida Valley. If we only consider Structure 31 and its surroundings, we see the possibility that the local people of the Florida Valley began to build the Main Group of El Puente in the 7th century, adopting cultural elements of the growing powerful kingdom to reinforce their authority.

Site Plan

Even if Stela P of the eleventh king tells about Copan's expansion to the La Entrada region, it was in the La Venta Valley, and the situation was not necessarily the same in the Florida Valley. Although two valleys are often treated as one under the name of the La Entrada, they could have distinct meanings for the Copan Kingdom. As the first step to discuss the difference between them, we will compare the two valleys in two aspects.

First, we will focus on the non-Maya site plan found widely in the Lower Motagua Valley, and here we called it "Motagua Quadrangle." It consists of four long, narrow platforms sur-

rounding the court or plaza, which are often joined together to form closed corners, and its elaborate versions consisted of two to four adjoining court complexes sharing a structure(s) between them [Schortman and Nakamura 1991: 319], differing from that of Mayan construction, in which independent structures surround a square space.

Figure 7 shows the distribution of this site plan in the La Entrada region. In the La Venta Valley, this site plan is scattered among medium-sized sites in the southern part, but this is not the case for the two largest sites, Los Higos and Roncador (Figure 8). In the northern part of the valley, there is no Motagua Quadrangle, including in small- and medium-scale sites.

On the other hand, in the Florida Valley, Motagua Quadrangle is found in almost all the largest sites. This pattern is evident in Techin and Nueva Suyapa in the northern part of the valley (Figure 9). Also, in El Puente (Figure 2), El Abra, and Las Pilas (Figure 10), we can see this arrangement of structures, but as Schortman and Nakamura mention [1991: 317], it is different in that there are independent pyramids, such as Structures 1 and 31 of El Puente, manifesting a compromise of “Lowland Maya” and

“Lower Motagua” patterns.

Naturally, what the site shows today is the final stage of its occupation. At all these sites, ceramics of the Late Classic Period have been confirmed via excavation or surface survey. At the time of their abandonment, non-Maya cultural element, Motagua Quadrangle was distributed all over the Florida Valley and the southern part of the La Venta Valley. If Copan had strengthened its “influence” on these areas with remnants of this non-Maya site plan, perhaps this occurred late in the period and had a brief duration. As a result, this might not have been enough time to change or shift the site plan to that of Copan-Maya.

Copan-Painted Pottery

In the La Entrada region, four Copan-painted ceramics are present: Copador Polychrome (Figure 11), Gualpopa Polychrome, Caterpillar Polychrome, and Chilanga Red. According to the conventional chronology by Viel at Copan [Viel 1983], Copador is mainly 8th century pottery, while Gualpopa, Caterpillar, and Chilanga are 7th century or earlier. Besides, large quantities of Copador have been confirmed in the Southeast Maya region, and

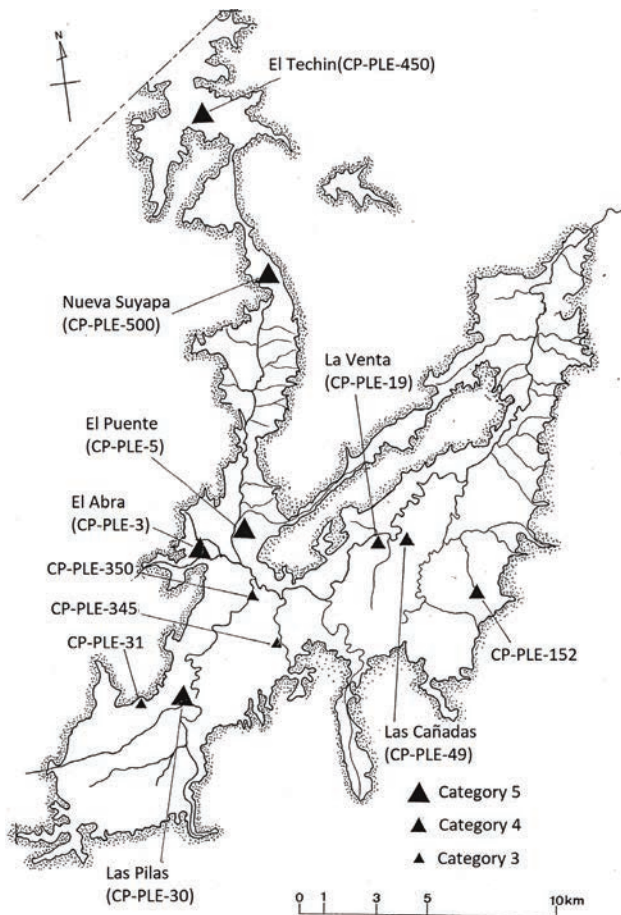


Fig.7 Distribution of Motagua Quadrangle in the La Entrada Region

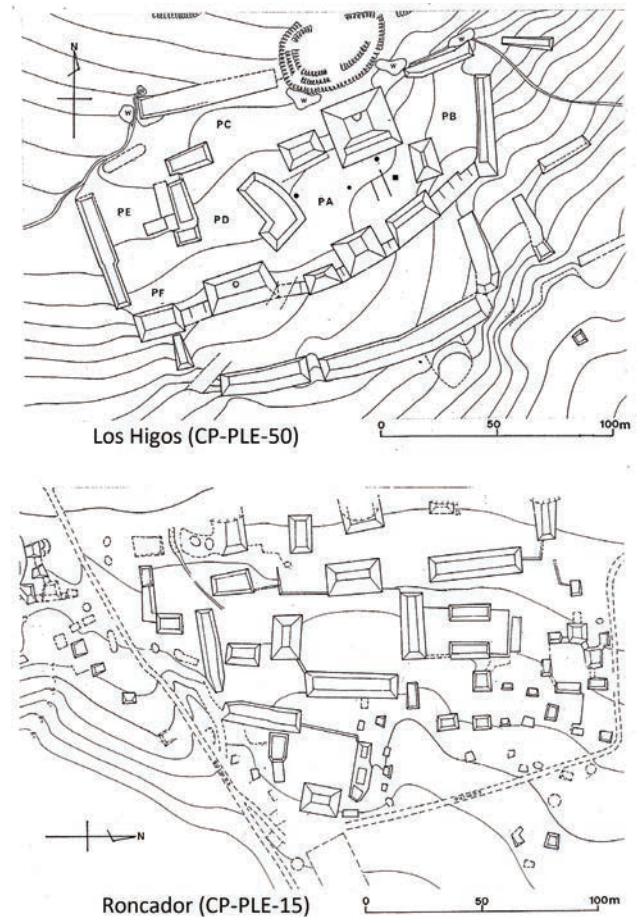


Fig.8 Sites in the La Venta Valley (from Nakamura et al. 1991, Appendix map)

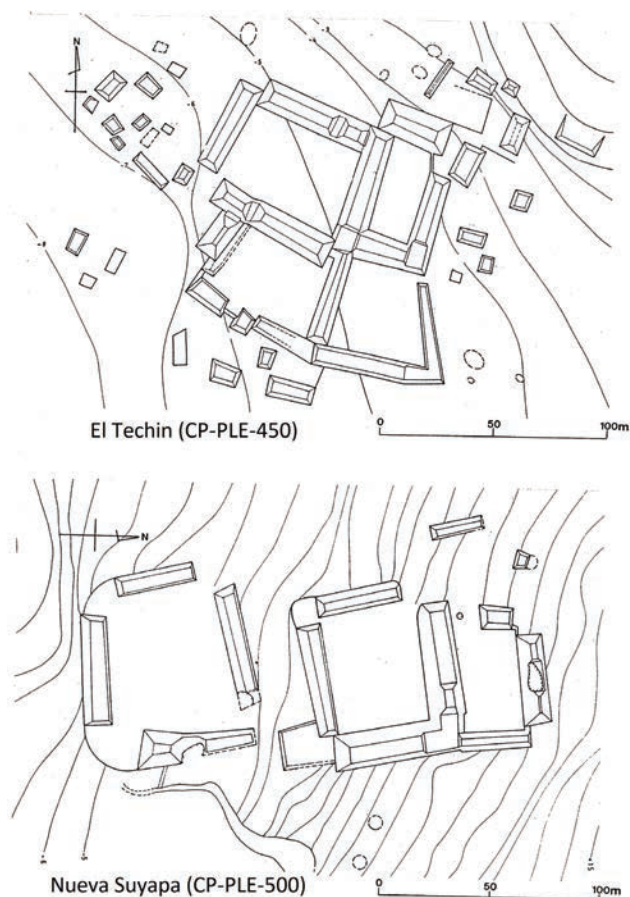


Figure 9 Sites in the Northern Florida Valley (from Nakamura et al. 1991, Appendix map)

the distribution is comparable to the sum of the other painted potteries.

The new ceramic chronology proposed the early 7th century as the possible beginning of Copador [Bill 1997:13–14, 325]. However, this fine pottery likely began being distributed widely in the Southeast Maya periphery, including the La Entrada region, sometime in the first half of the 8th century, as will be discussed.

As to Copador, there have been discussions about its origin and production place based on compositional analysis of the characteristic cream paste. At various sites in Southeast Mesoamerica, the clay of this fine ceramic shows similar chemical compositions. There was a hypothesis that this pottery was produced in the Copan Valley [Bishop et al. 1986], and later Neff et al. suggested it was made in Western El Salvador and exported to Copan in huge quantities [Neff et al. 1999]. Wherever the production site was, there has been no significant objection to the point until today that Copan controlled the distribution of Copador. Interestingly, even though this ceramic is widely diffused in Southeastern Mesoamerica, it is virtually nonexistent in

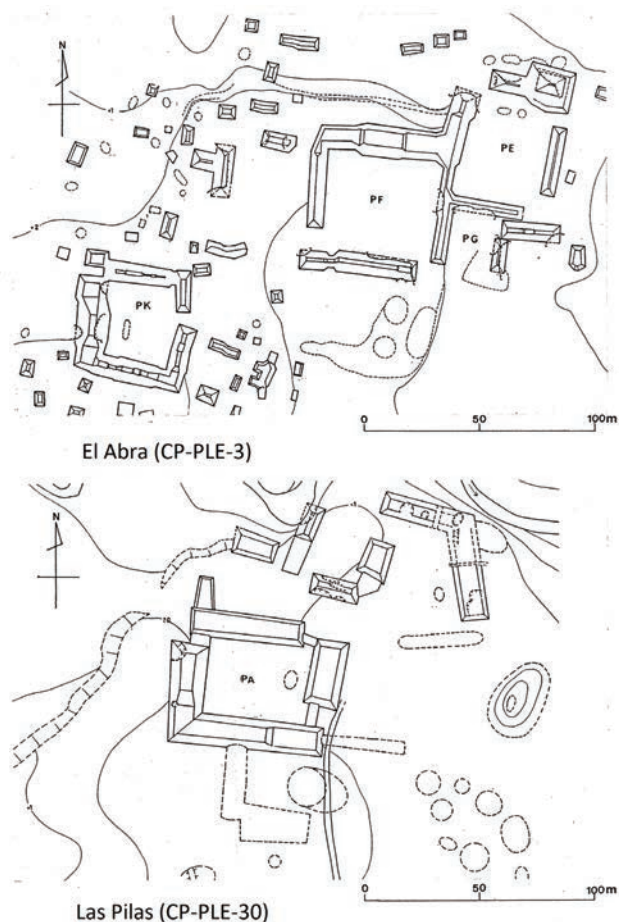


Figure 10 Sites in the Southern Florida Valley (from Nakamura et al. 1991, Appendix map)

Quirigua, another large classic center in Southeast Maya [Sharer 1978]. The only logical explanation for this phenomenon is that Copador “began to circulate outside the Copan Valley after AD 738” [Leventhal 1986: 140-142; Nakamura 1994:79], later than other painted ceramics such as Gualpapa, Chilanga, or Caterpillar. In that year, the ruler of Quirigua, which had previously been under the subordination of the Copan Kingdom, murdered the thirteenth Copan’s king. Consequently, the two kingdoms entered into hostile relations. The assemblages of painted potteries from the early Coner period at Copan are mainly Gualpapa and Chilanga, with little Copador mixed in [Bill 1997:401]. It also confirms that the Copador is later than other painted ceramics.

Table 1 shows the results of the test pit excavations carried out during the first phase of the La Entrada archaeological project [Sato 1991b], from which only Copan-painted potteries are extracted. Strictly speaking, the excavations are inadequate to offer comparable data because the test pits’ size and locations at each site were not standardized. However, a clear pattern can be discerned from this table. Copador, the later ceramic type, is more abundant in the Florida Valley, while other earlier painted

*Table 1 Frequency of Copan Painted Ceramics Types in the La Entrada Region
(From Sato 1991b: Figures 58, 59, 61, 78)*

Zone Site No.(Site Category)	Copador	Gualpopa (A)	Chilanga (B)	Caterpillar (C)	(A)+(B)+(C)
Northern Florida Valley					
14(5) Techin	17	14	0	0	14
500(5) Nueva Suyapa	18	0	0	0	0
540(3)	3	0	0	0	0
522(2)	4	0	0	0	0
Central-Southern Florida Valley					
3(5) El Abra	19	9	9	1	19
31(3)	7	1	1	0	2
Central-Southern La Venta Valley					
50(5) Los Higos	2	0	3	0	3
17(4) La Meca	5	0	3	0	3
53(4) La Jagua	47	0	2	0	2
283(3)	8	2	17	0	19
Northern La Venta Valley					
26(4) Diablo	20	12	21	1	34
150(4)	0	1	4	0	5
40(3)	8	1	0	0	1
203(3)	24	0	0	0	0
219(2)	1	0	0	0	0

Site Category: Larger the number, larger the site scale

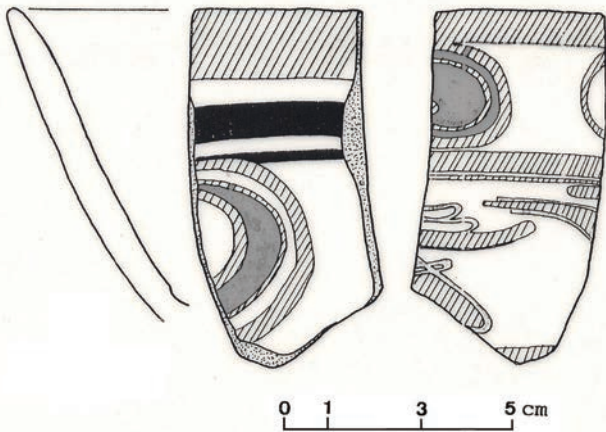


Figure 11 Copador Polychrome recovered from Layer 1, Structure 31, El Puente

ceramics are frequent in the La Venta Valley. At three of the four sites in the northern Florida Valley, only Copador was collected. Meanwhile, in the south-central part of La Venta Valley, an opposite trend is observed. There are several sites, such as Los Higos (CP-PLE-50), CP-PLE-283, CP-PLE-26, and CP-PLE-150, where the amount of Gualpopa, Chilanga, and Caterpillar exceeded that of Copador. Such sites do not exist in the Florida

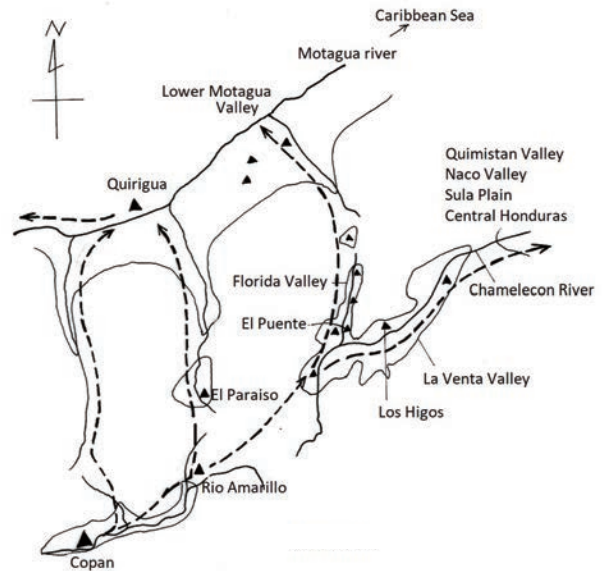


Figure 12 Trade Routes from Copan

Valley.

The prevalence of Copador suggests that the Florida Valley strengthened its relationship with the Copan dynasty later than the La Venta Valley. It was probably after AD 738 and maybe only for a brief period before the dynastic collapse of Copan in

the 9th century.

Aoyama [1994] has already pointed out that the distribution range of the Ixtepeque obsidian is limited to the Florida Valley and the southern La Venta Valley, which overlaps with that of Copador, and that Copan's economic policies are behind this.

Background of the Copan Dynasty's Expansion Eastward

Regardless of when it was and how firmly it was, Copan expanded to the La Entrada region, and it will be an important question what the kingdom "sought" there.

For the Copan Kingdom, the La Venta Valley was a transit point of the long-distance trade route leading eastward down the Chamelecon River to the Naco Valley, to the Sula Plain, to Central Honduras, or even further to Lower Central America (Figure 12). If the emblem glyph inscribed on Copan's Stela P of AD 623 is that of Los Higos, it may reflect the arrival of Copan to the La Venta Valley in the early 7th century to secure its path to Western/Central Honduras.

On the other hand, in the 7th century, the Florida Valley had little importance for Copan with regards to extending the trade route. From Copan, going east through Rio Amarillo, one of its secondary centers, and passing a divide, it reaches the Florida Valley. From there, going up the Chinamito River, there is another watershed, and further on, it goes down to the Lower Motagua Valley. Downstream, the Motagua River leads to the Caribbean Sea, and upstream, the way proceeds to Upper and Middle Valley, containing jade sources. However, in the 7th century, at least by AD 652, Copan controlled Quirigua as its satellite center on the Motagua River [Martin and Grube 2008:201], and the route via Florida Valley to the Lower Motagua Valley was unimportant. To reach the Motagua River from Copan, one could go to Quirigua without taking the detour route that crossed watersheds twice.

Thus, if Copan established an enclave in the Florida Valley in the 7th century, it had to be for the land itself rather than to go somewhere via it. Canuto and Bell suppose that the El Paraiso Valley, some 30 km to the east, was a "maize baskets" for Copan residents in the 8th century, when the arable land of their homeland was blanketed with dense settlement [Canuto and Bell 2013:6]. However, it is questionable whether Copan extended its rule over remote lands and crops as early as the 7th century.

In the 8th century, the situation changed drastically. After AD 738, Copan had to find a route to the Motagua River, bypassing Quirigua, which had become a hostile force. The Florida Valley, which had been unimportant as a trade route, suddenly became essential to Copan after its defeat against Quirigua.

Perhaps the Copan dynasty bolstered its presence in the Florida Valley after AD 738, which lasted only shortly until its collapse in the early 9th century. If so, the distribution of the non-Maya site plan, the Motagua Quadrangle in the Florida Valley, and the southern La Venta Valley is understandable. Furthermore, Copador, which seems to have begun to circulate in large quantities after AD 738, may be evidence that the Copan dynasty strengthened ties with the Florida Valley, especially in the northern part at that time.

HUMAN MOBILITY BETWEEN COPAN AND ITS PERIPHERY

What, then, was the "influence," "expansion," or "entry" event to which we have been referring? Underlying the diffusion of archaeological culture is the movement of people, goods, and ideas. Of these, the movement of people has been the subject of much scientific research in recent years.

One of the themes discussed in the paper was whether migrants from Copan started the construction of the Main Group of El Puente or whether the local people imitated the architectural style of Copan. In this regard, a biological study has revealed the possibility of immigration.

Genetic research was realized with the teeth of two buried individuals excavated at El Puente and twelve from Copan [Shinoda 2003]. The primary purpose was to compare them to those of contemporary people living in that area and other places of Central America. However, this analysis of DNA presented another interesting fact as a byproduct. Two samples of El Puente and three of Copan demonstrated some possibility of matrilineal linkage among them. It is a small sample size study that presents one probability, but another stimulating biochemical research has been conducted in Copan.

Suzuki et al. [2020] measured strontium, oxygen, and carbon isotopes in human tooth enamel from 66 burials in 9L-22 and 9L-23 residential groups at Copan to detect these individuals' provenience. According to this analysis, the burials of local Copanecans and foreign-born peoples are distributed mixedly in the same residential complexes, exhibiting simultaneity in some cases. The data also show that in addition to the newcomers from central or northern Maya Lowlands, the non-Maya immigrants from Western/Central Honduras were sufficiently integrated into the Maya society, demonstrated by some burial of non-Maya immigrants with Maya-style funerary treatment. Furthermore, Suzuki et al. suppose that it probably became more pronounced during the twelfth king's reign and climaxed when the thirteenth king invited non-Maya elites to the royal capital to ensure his in-

fluence on Western/Central Honduras. However, it was probably brought to a halt by the king's unexpected death in 738.

Reconsidering the first question about the starting of massive construction at El Puente with this information, the possibility that Copan built an enclave in the Florida Valley during the reign of the twelfth king, who had a strong interest in the eastern region, seems to fit the trend of the time. In Rio Amarillo [McNeil et al. 2022], a center located in the middle of the route from Copan to Florida valley, Altar 1, with a possible date of AD 643, was erected by a junior member of the Copan royal family, and his father may have been the twelfth king. Then, under the Copan's control, structures of river cobbles and wattle-and-daub were replaced with cut stone façades of a pyramidal platform and an impressive stairway, appearing consistent with the phenomenon seen at El Puente, whether there is a strict parallel.

However, if non-Maya people enjoyed the material culture of Copan and were buried in the Maya-style, as is the case in Copan, it does not seem impossible that this happened in El Puente as well. Therefore, the Tomb 3 interment does not necessarily mean that the person is from Copan, despite being buried inside a Copan-style structure with the Copan-type grave goods. Furthermore, since Copan was a multi-ethnic city, diverse interpretations can be made of the possible maternal kinship between the buried individuals of Copan and El Puente. Of course, it is not necessary to think that people moved from Copan to El Puente. The reverse is also possible.

The migration from Western/Central Honduras to Copan is being discussed. However, if we look at the long-term scale from the Preclassic to the Postclassic, even in the Copan Valley, home of the dynasty, the Maya themselves can be seen as outsiders. It has been argued that the reason for the similarities of archaeological cultures between the Late Preclassic and Early Postclassic Periods at Copan is that the people who carried them were of the same ethnicity [Manahan and Cantuto 2009]. Copan, the eastern capital of the Classic Maya, was inhabited and reigned by the Maya only during the Classic Period. The Maya of Copan, who built their dynasty on land originally inhabited by a non-Maya group, were intrusive in nature. We often forget this when blinded by the splendor and prosperity of the Classic Period.

CONCLUSION

From the author's perspective, based on the excavation of Structure 31, it seems that the construction of El Puente began and developed as a result of the growth of local power. On the other hand, Structure 1, probably constructed around the same time,

shows substantial similarity to Copan-Maya architecture and artifacts. However, the author is skeptical that this means the presence of the Copan royal family and that Copanecan migrants built El Puente and controlled the Florida Valley. Indeed, the trajectory of development of El Puente and El Amarillo, which became an outpost of Copan in the 7th century, is similar, but there is no clear evidence that tells Copan's direct control at El Puente such as the inscription of Altar 1 of El Amarillo. Moreover, El Amarillo is located only 20 km from Copan and is a transit point that must be passed through when heading east. El Puente's geographical importance was minor before AD 738, as stated above.

However, the possibility of a migration of human populations from the Copan Valley to the Florida Basin is not entirely ruled out. Canuto and Bell [2009], who compared two contemporaneous centers, El Paraiso and El Cafetal, in the El Paraiso Valley, explain that Copan adopted a strategy of founding its own administrative center of similar size close to the local autochthonous center. This "duplication strategy" of building paired centers at critical nodes on long-distance trading routes was used by Copan to accomplish their control by maintaining and emphasizing the cultural differences rather than completely assimilating the inhabitants of the surrounding regions into the kingdom.

Canuto and Bell identify El Puente as the local center and El Abra, 1.4 km from the former across the Chinamito River, as the center inaugurated by Copan in the Florida Valley. The author hesitates to agree with this hypothesis, but the contrast between Structures 1 and 31 at El Puente suggests that this situation may have existed within a single site. It is possible that the presence of Copan-painted ceramics in Structure 1 and the abundance of non-Maya local potteries in Structure 31 in their early stage might be caused by the chronological difference, with Str. 31-6 being slightly earlier than Phase 6, the cultural affiliations of the people who built and occupied the two structures, the activities that took place, and the economic disparities all combined.

If Copan made its outpost at El Puente in the 7th century, as discussed above, its purpose would be the land and crops, though Florida Valley seems too far to be a food supply area. But in any case, the situation changed after AD 738. While the thirteenth king's death weakened the ties with Western/Central Honduras, and the relative importance of the La Venta Valley seems to have declined, as seen in the relative scarcity of Copador Polychrome, the Florida Valley became an important trade route for Copan. The people of the Florida Valley increased close interaction with Copan, and the Copan-Maya style became more potent in the material culture. In the final phase of El Puente, in Structure 31

as well as in Structure 1, which has some stone sculptures, the stucco floor was laid on and around the platform, which had not been seen before. Also, stoneworking techniques were much more advanced than in the earlier phases. Copan-painted pottery, including Copadors, increased. And not only elite culture but even domestic ceramics such as Tango Brown, which bears similarities to Copan, were abundant.

However, it did not last long. At the beginning of the 9th century, the collapse of the Copan dynasty brought this prosperity to an end as it engulfed the surrounding region.

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