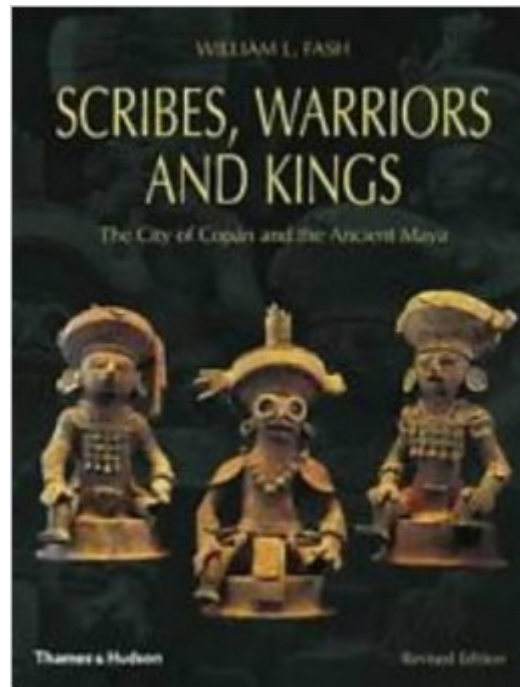


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# Scribes, Warriors And Kings: The City Of Copan And The Ancient Maya (New Aspects Of Antiquity)



## Synopsis

Traces the history of the city of Copan, and describes how new discoveries are shedding light on the city's collapse.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

the first 60 pages talks mainly about archaeological expeditions to Copan and who sponsored them etc. so there was little about the scribes, warriors or kings, but later it picked up. Copan appeared to be the "capital" city of loosely affiliated outlying villages with questionable allegiances. Since the allegiances were changing, Copan (rather the rulers of Copan and their families and associates) developed a rich ceremonial life with grandiose buildings, costumes, calendars etc. in order to impress the commoners into accepting the ruling class' authority. At least that is one interpretation offered in the book. Also the book seems to stress the deforestation theory for the demise of Copan, saying that "success" in agriculture and population growth brought about heavy erosion due to overuse of timber. Copan was never able to form alliances to any substantial degree with any other major city and in fact there is evidence of bitter rivalry between some of the smaller cities as well as the major ones. I was unaware before reading this book that a lot of the Mayan temples were built by the rulers of Copan as a form of sacred ancestor worship. There are great photos of a lot of the more profound discoveries of Copan particularly the Eccentric flints from the Hieroglyphic stairway. The author claims that presently there is no flint napper alive today who could duplicate this feat. I also enjoyed the descriptions of the "Bat" houses and their possible sinister uses

to shelve "sacrificial victims". There is also a good picture of the way a lot of these Mayan temples would have been painted because today all we see too often is the bare limestone facings. The deep reds and greens must have made for a real sacred appearance that would no doubt astonish. Was the message--"Your link to the nether-world, get it here" reinforcing the status and authority of Copan's rulers. Whose to say, maybe they actually did have a fast tract to the nether-world, at least till they ran out of trees?

I will be visiting Copan at the end of the month so I picked up this book to get some information about the place. Overall the book is really good with lots of pictures which definitely is a plus with me. The explanations are very good although I found myself re-reading some of them often because the author uses a lot of technical terms. The book is too big so I will not carry it with me when I visit Copan. It would have been a plus if the book would have been smaller. One thing that I didn't like was the fact that the author spends too many pages explaining Copan's relationship with other cities in the area. I would have loved to read more about the people of Copan, their daily lives and their beliefs. But again, good introduction.

I confess that I was enamored of Copan (and other Mayan "lost cities") long before reading this book. I was privileged to visit five Classic Maya sites, beginning with Copan, in 1991; subsequent digs and research made possible this fascinating semi-popular book. I read it with sheer delight -- and great admiration for the scholarship of the authors (and that of their colleagues, whose revelations likewise were essential). If you are intellectually incurious, don't bother. But if you are intellectually curious, don't fail to read this wonderful book -- and then don't fail to visit Copan and the relatively new and grand museum, if you possibly can!

William Fash and his wife have been working at Copan for decades and now are the overseers of the ruins. I am reviewing the 192 page (1994 edition) paperback here, although there is a 2001 revised edition now too. Fash covers the geographical environment, history, art, architecture, burials and all other vital aspects of Copan, rarely speculating and noting it is his opinion when he does, which is a refreshing change from the all-too-often "authoritative" opinions offered by both amateurs and experts in the archaeological field. He writes in a clear, easily-understandable style that I found very interesting and extremely informative. Included are maps, drawings and reconstructions, many b/w photos and a fair number of full-page color photos. This text doesn't dwell heavily on interpreting the glyphs, but when he is sure of a translation, he provides it. Recent discoveries (up to

the time of this edition) are discussed at length, and examples are clearly shown. All-in-all, Fash provides a good overall view of the ruins, his and others' work there, and how theories about the site have evolved as new discoveries are made. Copan is one of the most excavated and explored Mayan cities to date, yet Fash points out that new finds are constantly being made that sometimes alter our interpretations of the society and religion. He also delves into the living conditions of the non-elite population that made the city possible. Gods and goddesses are discussed but not in great depth as he would then be speculating. It's obvious he and his wife love Copan and consider it their home. They are enthusiastic yet extremely careful and serious scientists who long to know as much about Copan as possible. This isn't a book that is just for experts, yet it goes far beyond the typical general overview I find so frustrating in other books. I highly recommend this book for anyone with more than just a passing fancy in Copan and/or the great accomplishments of the Maya.

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