

Archaic dialogues between humans and nature.
Sacred places vol 2.

Copan, Honduras and Brihadishvara, India



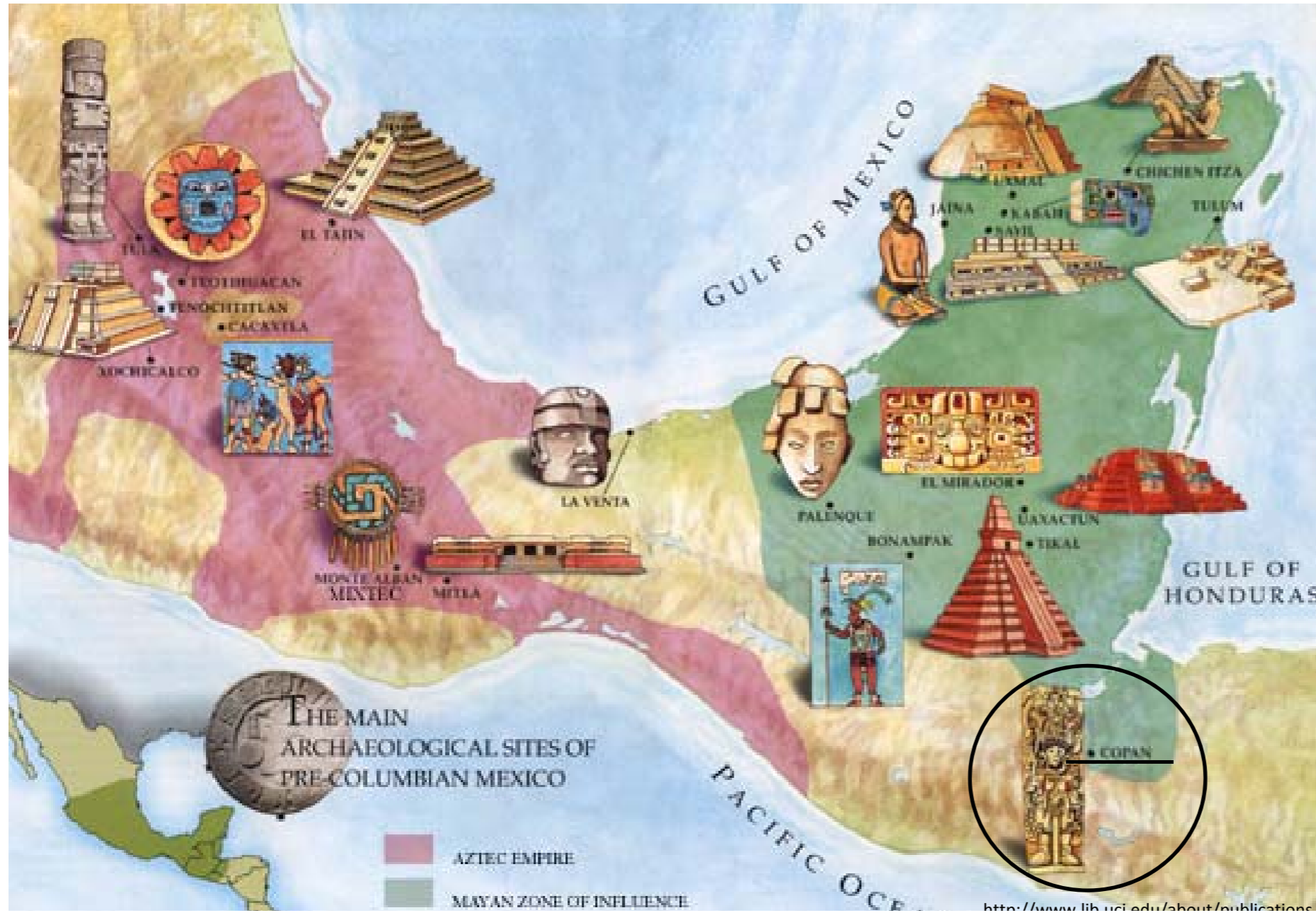
"Lost Kingdoms of the Maya", G. S. Stuart,
George E. Stuart ; The National Geographic
Society, Washington, 1993



<http://www.indiamike.com/india-images/pictures/thanjavur-brihadisvara-temple-0>

Mesoamerican World and Mayas

Copan, Honduras



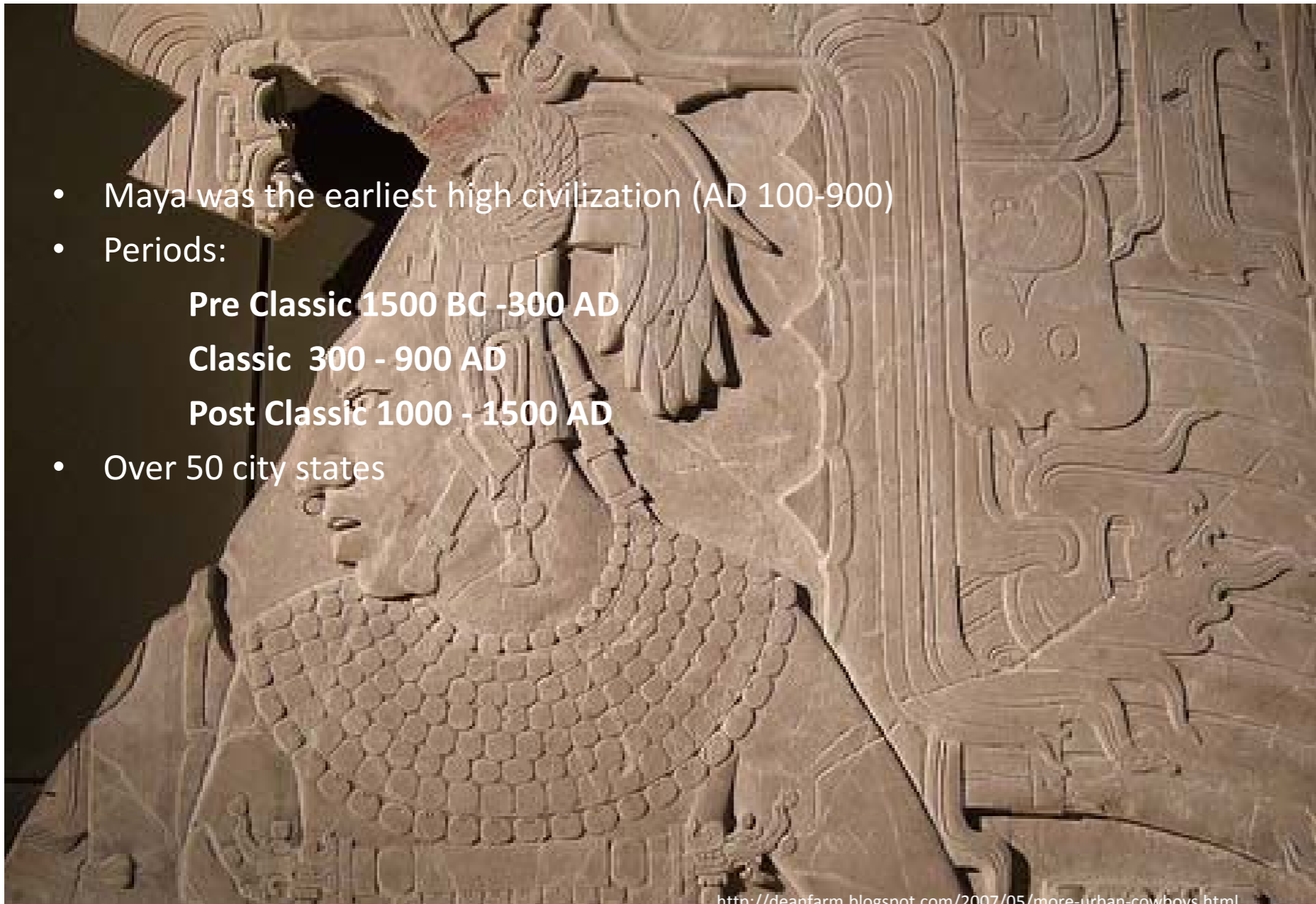
The Maya area is generally divided into three loosely defined zones: the southern Maya highlands, the central lowlands, and the northern lowlands.¹ The Maya country east and south of Mexico, rose gradually from low limestone and savanna grass across tropical forests (mahogany, ceiba, palms, saprodilla, colourful bird life) to the volcanic Guatemala mountains and west Honduras.²

¹ „The Maya (6th ed.)“, Coe, Michael D., New York: Dante Reed 1999, p. 31

² „The Landscape of Man“, Jeffrey and Susan Jellicoe, New York 1975, p. 98-99

Mayas

Copan, Honduras



- Maya was the earliest high civilization (AD 100-900)
- Periods:
 - Pre Classic 1500 BC -300 AD**
 - Classic 300 - 900 AD**
 - Post Classic 1000 - 1500 AD**
- Over 50 city states

The Mayan civilization was the earliest high civilization in Mesoamerica (AD 100-900). It was based on a religious hierarchy dominating an agrarian population. The civilization was based on the worship of the sun for its power to create fertility.

Many people believe that the ancestors of the Mayans crossed the Bering Strait at least 20,000 years ago. They were nomadic hunter-gatherers. The earliest settlements were sites on rivers or lakes in forest areas.

Evidence of settled habitation in Mexico is found in the Archaic period 5000-1500 BC where corn cultivation, basic pottery and stone tools were dominating. The first true civilization was established with the rise of the Olmecs in the **Pre-Classic** period 1500 BC -300 AD. The Olmecs settled on the Gulf Coast.³

Many Maya cities reached their highest state of development during the **Classic period** (250 to 900 AD), and continued throughout the Post-Classic period until the arrival of the Spanish in the 16th century.⁴

After the Classic period, the Mayans migrated to the Yucatán peninsula. There they developed their own character, although their accomplishments and artwork are not considered as impressive as the Classic Mayans.

There were over **50 powerful Mayan city-states** with thousands of villagers and while city-state was unique in its own way, they shared the same religious beliefs, architectural designs and political systems.⁵

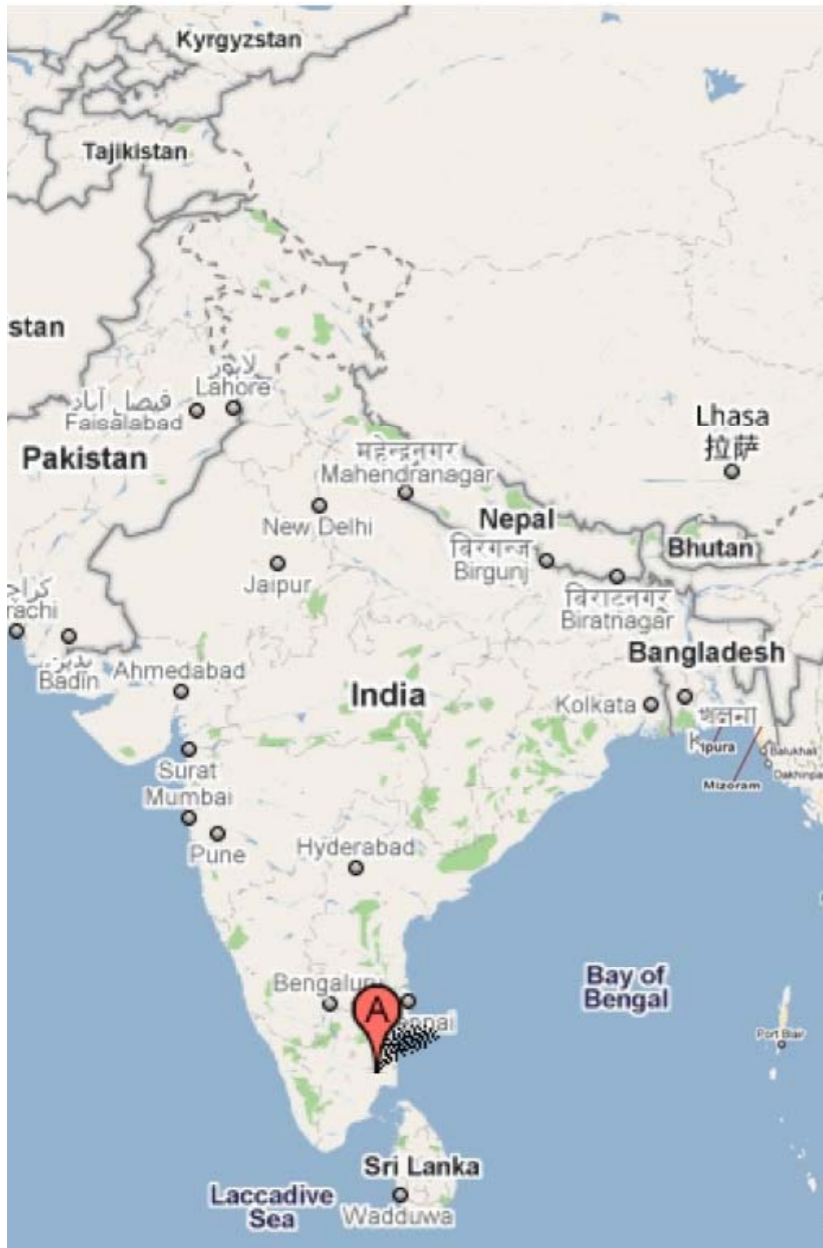
³ <http://www.crystalinks.com/mayanhistory.html>

⁴ „The Maya (6th ed.)“, Coe, Michael D., New York: Dante Reed 1999, p. 31

⁵ „The Maya. People of the Maize“, Diana L. Driver, Texas 2010, p. 93

Hinduism

Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, South-India



Hinduism a religious mainstream which evolved organically and spread over a large territory marked by significant ethnic and cultural diversity. This mainstream evolved both by innovation from within, and by assimilation of external traditions or cults into the Hindu fold. The result is an enormous variety of religious traditions, ranging from innumerable small, unsophisticated cults to major religious movements with millions of adherents spread over the entire subcontinent. The identification of Hinduism as an independent religion separate from Buddhism or Jainism.¹

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism>

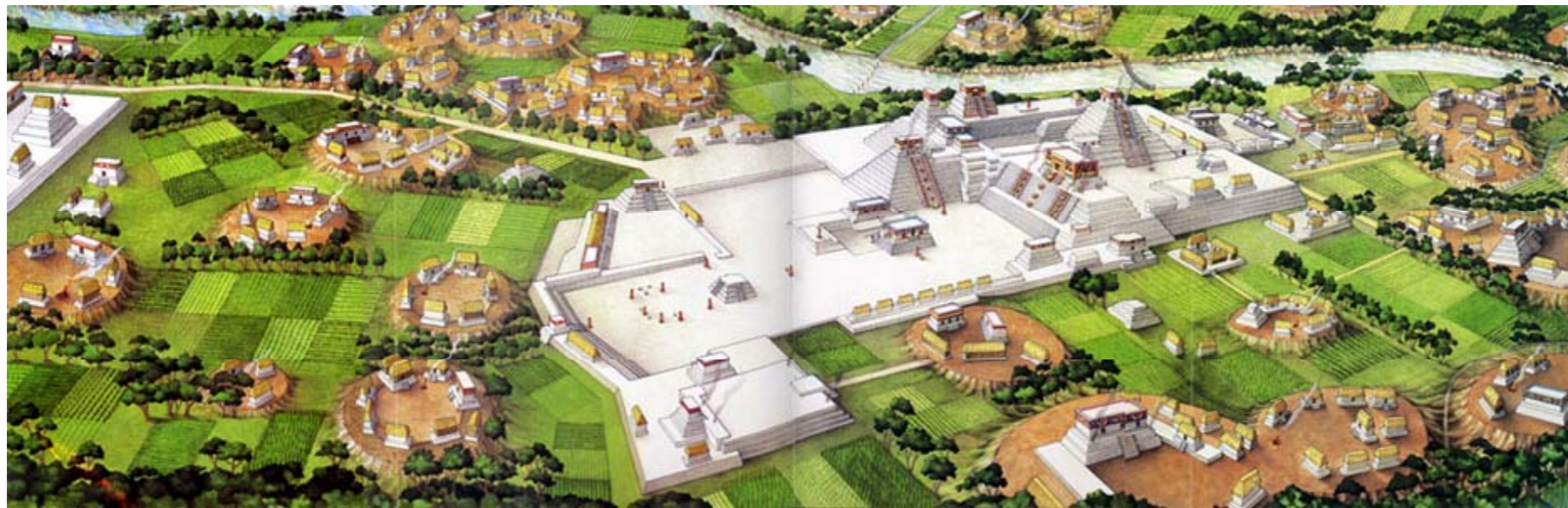
History of Copan

Copan, Honduras

- First settlement approx 2000 BC
- The city erected 5.-9. century AD
- 9000 to 12000 inhabitants
- Metals were unknown

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&v=tr2DB-nMaLQ>

<http://www.delange.org/Copan1/Copan1.htm>



First settlement date back to approx 2000 BC. The city erected 5.-9. century AD but defeated by the ruler of the neighbouring city called Quirigua. It is estimated that the peak population in central Copán was between 6000 to 9000 in the main area, exceeding an estimated total population of 18,000 to 25,000 people in the Copán Valley during the Late Classic period.⁷ Metals were unknown as gold and copper were discovered in the 14th century.

Most of Maya cities were built upon level ground, either extensive plains or valley floors. But in others, especially in the western part of Maya areas like Copan, the sites are surrounded by hills and forests.⁸ Open spaces such as plazas were the focus of the city where the public assembled and these great plazas were surrounded by temples, monuments, ball courts and governmental buildings. Beyond the religious buildings and ceremonial plazas where the palaces of the nobles, then came the residences of the lesser nobles and on the outskirts of the cities were the homes of the ordinary citizens. Peasants and farmers lived in the outlying areas.

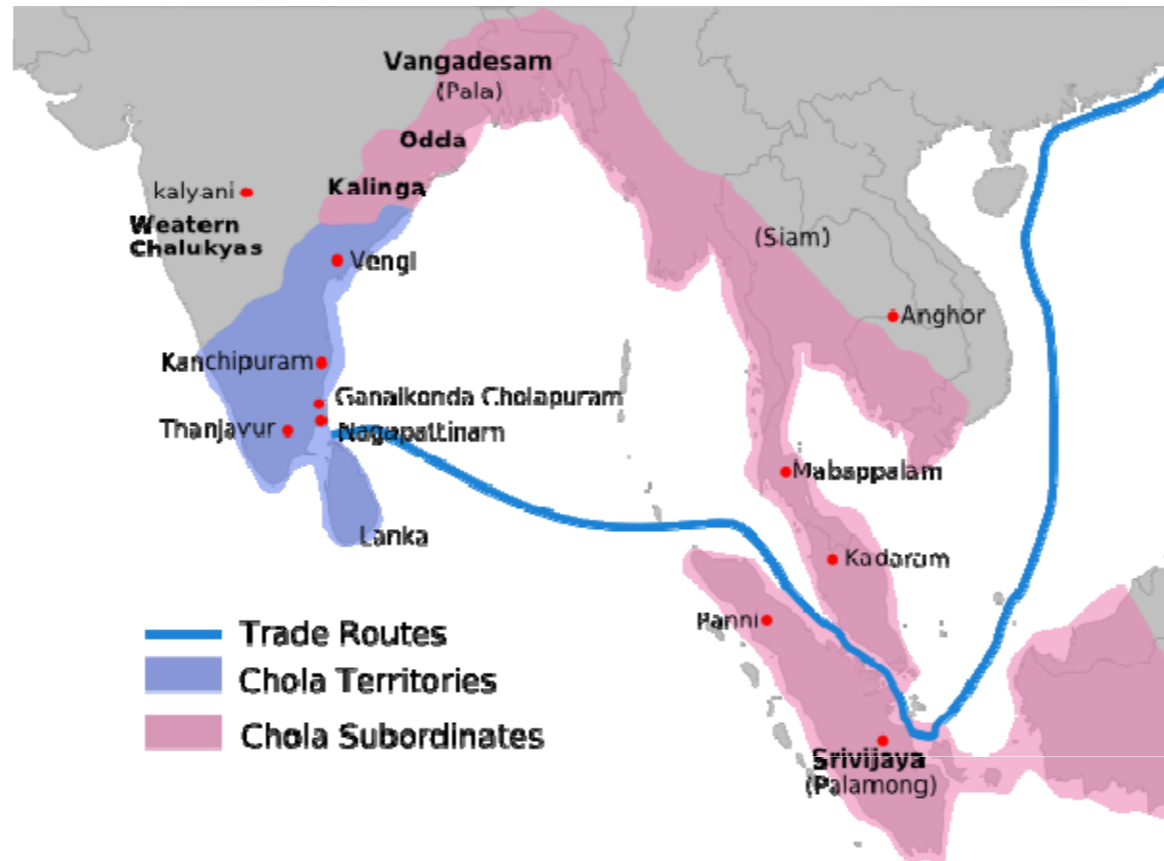
⁷ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cop%C3%A1n>

⁸ A Study of Maya Art, Herbert J. Spinden, New York 1975, p.9

Chola Dynasty

- 3rd century BC until 13th century AD
- The Cholas were the second great historic dynasty of the Tamil Nadu, the Tamil country, which was the home of the ancient Dravidian culture
- The Chola kings were avid builders and envisioned the temples in their kingdoms not only as places of worship but also as centres of economic activity.

Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, South-India



http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3d/Rajendra_map_new.png

The Cholas were the second great historic dynasty of the Tamil Nadu, the Tamil country, which was the home of the ancient Dravidian culture whose influence was so considerable in the whole of south-east Asia. The great temple of Tanjore was built in a few years, from 1003 to 1010, during the reign of the great king Rajaraja (985-1014).²

² <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/250>

Brihadishvara

Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, South-India

- Names of the temple - Brihadeshvara, Brihadishvara, Brihadeeshwarar, Brahadeeswara, Brihadeesvara, Peruvudaiyar Koyil, Rajarajeswaram, Thanjavur`s temp
- Built 1003-1010 AD
- Presentation Chola Empire ideology, Tamil civilisation, Dravidian style
- Made for God Shiva
- Architecturally, it is the most ambitious structural temple built of granite. Brihadisvara Temple is within a spacious inner Prakara of 240.90 m long and 122m broad

Built between the period of 1003 and 1010 by the founder of Chola dynasty, the great king Rajaraja, the Brihadishvara Temple, due to its magnificence, has been designated as World Heritage Site.³



www.art-and-archaeology.com/india/thanjavur/bri07.html



www.worldaffairsboard.comroom/19562-akshardham-temple-new-d/multimedia-jukebox-elhi-wow-3.html

³ http://www.cultural-heritage-india.com/world_heritage_sites/brihadisvara-temple.html

Environment of Copan

- Pleasant climate
- Mountains – the site 600 m high
- Corn as the main grain
- Tobacco could have been originated from here
- Cocoa beans compared to money

Copan, Honduras



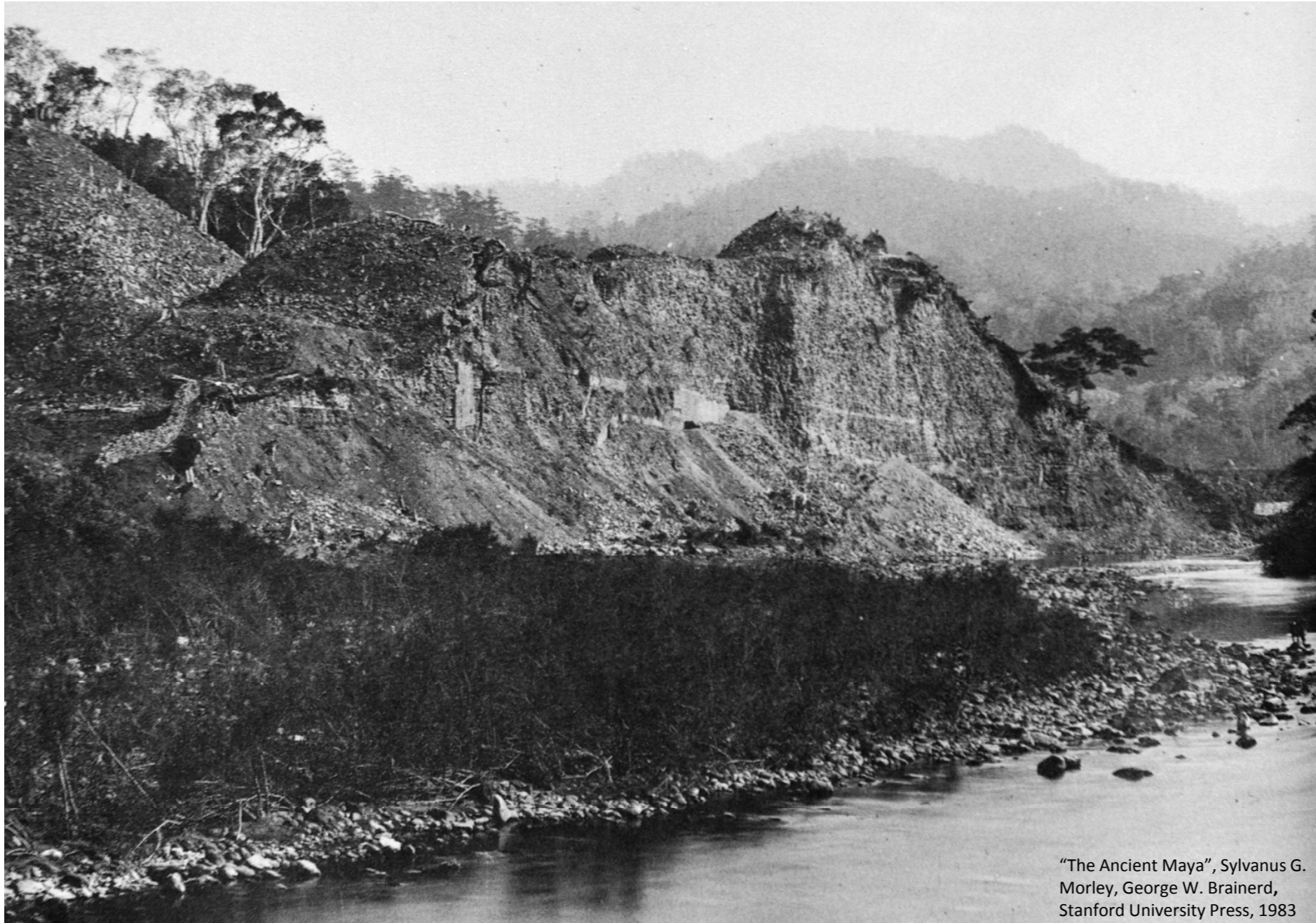
<http://gettyimages.com>

Thanks to its situation some 600 metres above sea level in a fertile valley of a river, Copan enjoys one of the most pleasant climates anywhere in the jungles of Central America. Their main food was corn and cocoa beans were equivalent to money which they traded with. The tobacco plant may have originated from here.⁶

⁶ „Art of the Maya, Ferdinand Anton“, Thames and Hudson London 1970, p.43-45

River

Copan, Honduras



"The Ancient Maya", Sylvanus G. Morley, George W. Brainerd, Stanford University Press, 1983

The most interesting archaeological feature at Copan is the cross section of the Acropolis exposed by the **Rio Copan**. Since the city was abandoned in the early 9th century, the river has changed its course and cut away a great portion of the eastern base of the Acropolis, exposing a vertical face some 37 m high at the highest point and 300 m at the base which makes one of the largest archaeological cross sections in the world.⁹

⁹ The Ancient Maya, Sylvanus G. Morley, George W. Brainerd, Stanford University Press, 1983, p. 321-325

Environment

Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, South India

- Tropical wet and dry climate
- The temple complex sits on the banks of a Kaveri river that was channeled to make a moat around the complex's outer walls
- Narratives about the sacred geography of the location



www.tripadvisor.com/ShowUserReviews-g424926-d319964-r53084164-Brihadisvara_Temple-Thanjavur_Tamil_Nadu.html

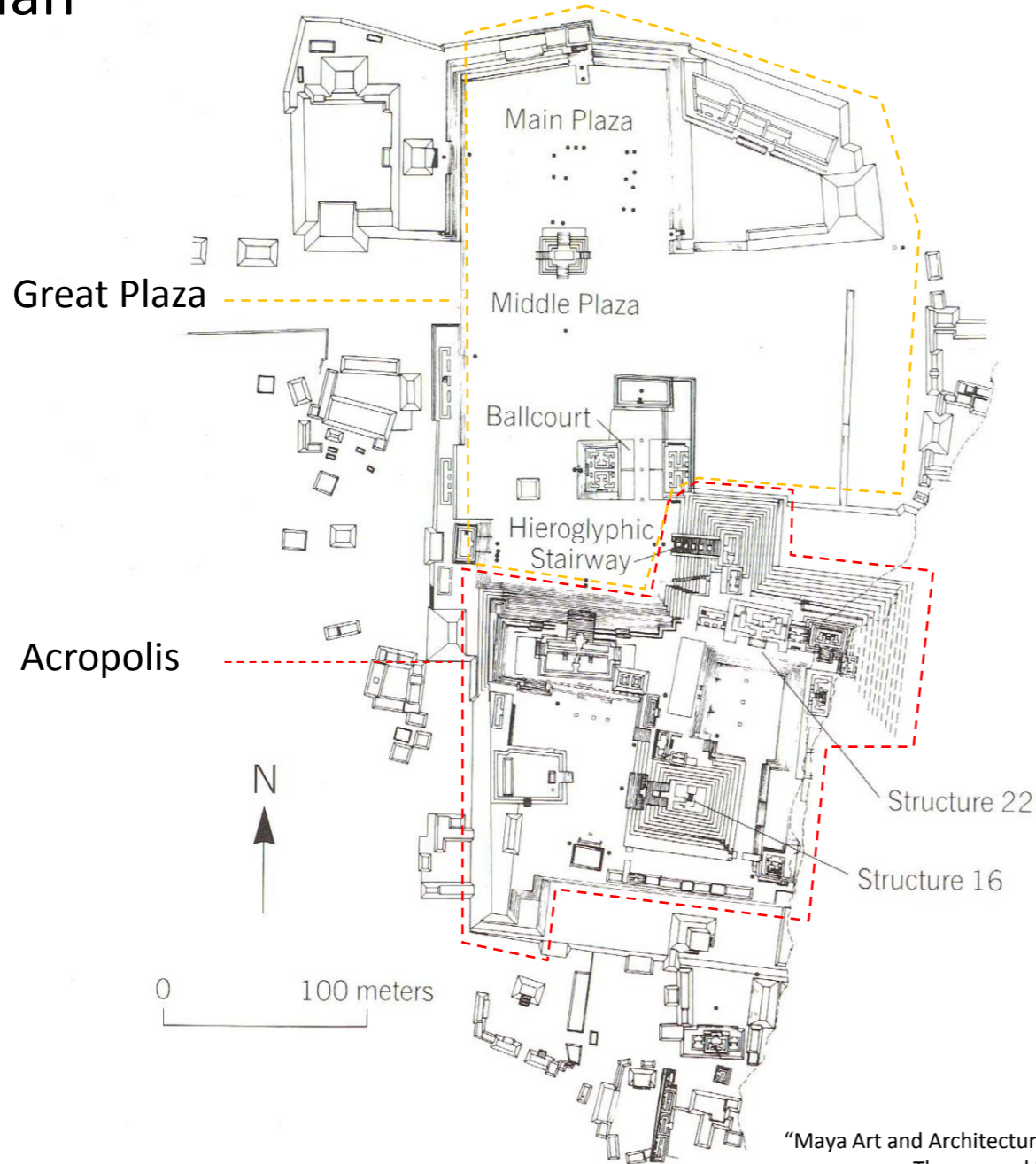


www.art-and-archaeology.com/india/thanjavur/bri02.html

The temple complex sits on the banks of a river that was channeled to make a moat around the complex's outer walls, the walls being built like a fortress. The complex is made up of many structures that are aligned axially. The complex can be entered either on one axis through a five-story gopuram or with a second access directly to the huge main quadrangle through a smaller free-standing gopuram.⁴

⁴http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brihadeeswarar_Temple

Plan



"Maya Art and Architecture", Mary Ellen Miller, Thames and Hudson London 1999

Copan, Honduras

- Open plan, no defensive walls
- Topography
- Main parts:
 - Ceremonial platform
 - Palaces
 - Temples
 - Ball court
- Built up by levels

Copan is not based on a central axis. While there is apparently no definite orientation, there is an orderly alignment of the buildings and terraces. The buildings of Copan are spacious, its plazas are open, allowing a view from almost every point of the mountains that skirt the fertile valley of the Rio Copan.¹⁰ Only at the end of the Classic era defensive walls were included to other cities.¹¹

Topography plays a big role as the site is clearly divided into lower and higher which in turn have also different levels as you move through it. This elaborate mode of grouping may have been intended to obtain a broad architectural effect.¹²

The mounds consist of solid mass of rubble, mortar and earth faced with cut stone. In many cases it's evident that they were built up by levels which means they consist of earlier mounds, buried walls, pathways and other remains of the city. When the city grew they were buried under a new acropolis.¹³

¹⁰ Art of the Maya, Ferdinand Anton, Thames and Hudson London 1970, p.303-304

¹¹ A Study of Maya Art, Herbert J. Spinden, New York 1975, p.9

¹² A Study of Maya Art, Herbert J. Spinden, New York 1975, p.9

¹³ "The Maya. People of the Maize", Diana L. Driver, Texas 2010, p.53-60

Great Plaza

Copan, Honduras

Copan is smaller than most cities. Area 600 by 300 m is composed of 2 main areas - the **Great Plaza** for public ceremonies accommodating thousands of people and the **Acropolis** that was restricted to the elites.



<http://www.delange.org/Copan1/Copan1.htm>

Acropolis

- Limited access, nobility only
- Jaguar plaza – painted yellow with black obsidian pits (volcanic glass)
- Courtyard of Temple 11 - rainwater harvesting

Copan, Honduras



<http://www.delange.org/Copan1/Copan1.htm>

The massive elevated complex on the south - the **Acropolis** and series of connected plazas and smaller structures to the north that includes the court of the Hieroglyphic Stairway and the Monument Plaza separated by a platform with four stairways. South of the Acropolis is a series of smaller plazas and palaces which were multi-purpose structural arrangements around courtyards and were used for administrative building as well as residences for the noble.¹⁴

The Acropolis consists of two enclosed plazas, the West and East courts and a series of elevated palaces, only one of which clearly had served as a residence. An altar there showed the entrance to Structure 16, a temple where 15 **jaguar skeletons** were discovered. The **Jaguar Plaza** was originally painted yellow, with black obsidian pits (volcanic glass)¹⁵

Temple 22, erected by 18 Rabbit, is considered one of Copán's most exquisite buildings, though it's now in ruins. The temple stands on raised terraced platforms and rises higher than other buildings. It has a passage leading to an interior room supported by huge skulls.¹⁶

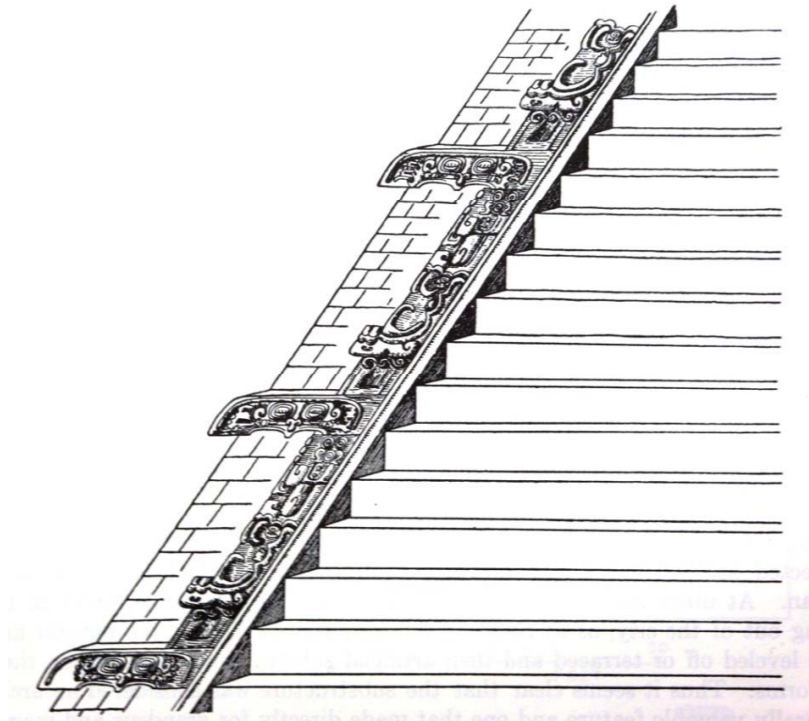
¹⁴ "The Maya. People of the Maize", Diana L. Driver, Texas 2010, p.53-60

¹⁵ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_4uoVweIBmc

¹⁶ "The Maya. People of the Maize", Diana L. Driver, Texas 2010, p.46-49

Stairways

- Stairs as secret mountains
- Hieroglyphic Stairways have around 2000 carved glyphs



A Study of Maya Art, Herbert J. Spinden, New York 1975

Copan, Honduras



<http://www.d.umn.edu/cla/faculty/troufs/anth3618/video/Copan.html>

The temples consisted of terraced platforms representing mountains; the stairway representing the path man could take to reach the gods; the temple itself where man could commune with the gods or become a god; and the roof combs which topped the giant temples and reached up the gods in the heavens. In addition, the doorways of the temples represent the mouths of caves entering to the underworld. The so-called sunken courts are also enclosed by stepped walls and are drained by tunnels that pass under the walls. Interesting fact is that they were collecting rainwater and filled the plaza of Temple 11 to have a feeling of a pond or a beach. The temples had special acoustic properties: whispers could be heard from one temple top to the other, also clapping in front of the temple steps created special echo. Temple 22 and temple 11 are elaborately covered with ornamented carvings. The walls become lighter towards north.¹⁷

The Court of **Hieroglyphic Stairway** is reached by 62 steps, called Hieroglyphic Stairway, going down, 10 m wide. A large anthropomorphic figure sits at the midpoint of every 12th step. Its largely jumbled but it's the longest inscription in Maya hieroglyphic writing, consisting of around 2000 carved glyphs.¹⁸ Steps were constructed on one or more sides of the pyramids and platform mounds. They were projected somewhat at the base and so were not so steep as the mounds themselves. Low balustrades were frequent.¹⁹

¹⁷ A Study of Maya Art, Herbert J. Spinden, New York 1975, p. 100

¹⁸ The Ancient Maya, Sylvanus G. Morley, George W. Brainerd, Stanford University Press, 1983, p. 321-325

¹⁹ A Study of Maya Art, Herbert J. Spinden, New York 1975, p. 97-157

Ballcourt

- Symbol of the diurnal passage of the sun
- Religious purpose
- Rubber ball, also skulls covered with rubber strips
- No hands used in the game

Copan, Honduras



The **ball court** - The ball game was already played by the Olmecs who were most probably the first race in the world to use balls made of rubber. The importance of the ball game in Maya and later civilizations is big, it had its foundations in cosmology. The ball flying through the air represented the sun, while the courts which were always laid out towards the north-east, represented the heavens and the underworld. The position of the courts in the immediate vicinity of the chief temples on every site leaves no doubt that the game had a purely religious significance. The players were not allowed to touch the ball with their hands but propelled it from the hips.²⁰

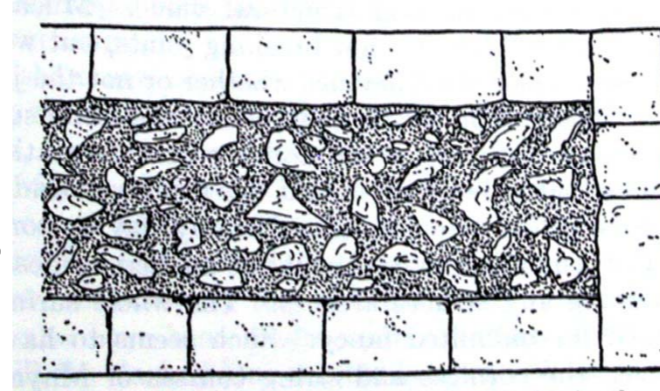


²⁰ Art of the Maya, Ferdinand Anton, Thames and Hudson London 1970, p.303-304

Materials

- Main building material - limestone
- Stones as cladding for the earth filled walls
- Small stone blocks
- Corbelled or “False” arch
- Red as a dominant colour

Copan, Honduras



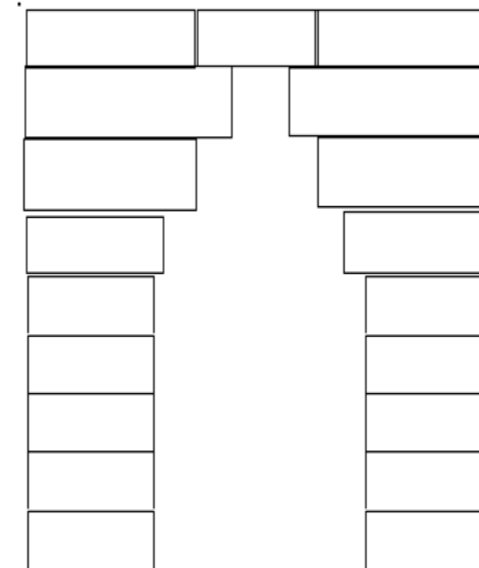
Wall cross-section

A Study of Maya Art, Herbert J. Spinden, New York 1975



False arch

<http://www.flickrriver.com/photos/ahvega/>



<http://masonrydesign.blogspot.com/2010/05/a-true-design-arches-and-enters-true.html>

The floors of the Great Ceremonial plazas which could be as thick as four feet were plastered with burnt limestone and usually replastered every 150 years. The plaza floors were mostly painted red.

The temples were made out of **limestone** which is easy to quarry because it doesn't harden until it comes in contact with the air. Unlike Egyptians, the Mayas used smaller blocks. They used burnt limestone to make both their plaster and cement.²¹

The walls - Rectangular blocks of fairly uniform size were laid neat and orderly manner. The corner stones were laid in a simple locking manner. A heavy layer of mortar was used for floors and a thin coating for walls. The method of construction – the Maya temple was a mud-walled structure and that stonework was added as a veneer.²²

Mesoamerican cultures never invented the keystone, and so were unable to build true arches, but instead all of their architecture made use of the **"false" or Corbelled arch**. These arches are built without centering and can be built without support, by corbelling regularly the horizontal courses of the wall masonry. This type of arch supports much less weight than a true arch.²³

²¹ "The Maya. People of the Maize", Diana L. Driver, Texas 2010, p.53-60

²² A Study of Maya Art, Herbert J. Spinden, New York 1975, p. 107

²³ <http://www.flickrriver.com/photos/ahvega/3772761887/>

Plan

Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, South India



mbstamps.blogspot.com/2010/12/picture-postcards-brihadeeswarar-temple.html

- www.view360.in/virtualtour/thanjavur

When Brihadishvara was constructed, it was the biggest temple in India. Moving away from the small-scale design of earlier temples, it set the standard for a new age of grandiose design.⁵ Its main feature is a pyramid-shaped „vimanam“, or tower, that consists of many horizontal layers of stone that taper closer to the top, forming the characteristic profile of Dravidian architecture. Vertically the vimanam is organized by pilasters that break up the facade of the base, creating spaces for niches and windows between. However, the temple departs from southern Indian convention in one significant way: the vimanam is taller than the „gopuram“ (gateways) of the temple’s walls. Normally the gopuram are taller than the vimanam.⁶ On top of the thirteen storeys is an octagonal cupola, carved out of a massive block of granite weighing 80 tons. The shadow of the cupola never falls to the ground, demonstrating the remarkable calculations of the architect.⁷

⁵<http://www.viewow.com/asia/india/thanjavur/brihadishvara-temple/details/>

⁶<http://www.orientalarchitecture.com/india/thanjavur/brihadishvara.php>

⁷<http://melissaenderle.blogspot.com/2010/01/thanjavur-brihadishvara-temple.html>

Materials

- The temple is made up of 130,000 tons of granite.
- The 60 metre tall vimana is the tallest in South India and it's entirely made out of granite.
- The Sikhara, a cupolic dome, is octagonal and rests on a single block of granite, a square of 7.8 m weighing 80 tons.

Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, South India



www.art-and-archaeology.com/india/thanjavur/bri01.html

The temple is made up of 130,000 tons of granite. The 60-metre tall vimana is the tallest in South India. A European-like figure which is carved on the vimana is believed to be an ancient warning of the arrival of the British. Later investigations by archaeologists proposed that this carving may be a hoax. It is widely believed that the shadow of the gopuram never falls on the ground. However, some scholars have dismissed this as a myth. The tons of stone was taken, with the help of hundreds of elephants, from Thirukoilore (birth place of Raja raja's mother) near Sri Virateshwara swamy temple. The kumbam, on top of the temple was believed to have taken to the top by creating a slope from the ground to the 66m gopuram made of soil. Then elephants would drag the stone to the top of gopuram.⁸

⁸http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brihadeeswarar_Tempe

Sculptures in Brihadishvara

Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, South India

The ornamentation of outer walls is much more profuse than in earlier shrines. The niches are deep and projecting. And the figures they formed are carved in the round. The lower niches mostly contain representations of Shiva in his various manifestations, including Nataraja. One of the upper level has 30 representations of Shiva as Thripuranthaka, destroyer of three cities. Three huge Shiva sculptures and many paintings are located in the circumambulatory passage around the sanctum. In front of the temple is almost 6 meter long Nandi bull carved out of a single stone⁹



www.art-and-archaeology.com/india/thanjavur/bri11.html



www.art-and-archaeology.com/india/thanjavur/bri03.html



www.art-and-archaeology.com/india/thanjavur/bri10.html

⁹ " A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From Stone Age to the 12th century", Upinder Singh, New Dehli 2008, p.560

Mural paintings

Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, South India



upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/f/fd/Rajaraja_mural.jpg/220px-Rajaraja_mural.jpg

<http://www.indiavideo.org/tamilnadu/art/painting/traditional/mural/murals-brihadeeswara-temple--1857.php#Desc>

The iconographic programme, inspired by Shiva mythology, also consists of a series of murals from the Chola period which decorate the corridor around the shrine. The famous series depicting Rajaraja in conversation with his guru, Karuvur Devar, gives a good idea of the graphic quality, the delicacy of the colours, the expressiveness of the characters which make this sequence one of the great masterpieces of Chola art.¹⁰

¹⁰ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/250>

Main functions, rituals

- Multi-purpose use
- Death rituals - fear of the destructive nature of their gods
- No cemetery, bones found under plazas of the palaces



<http://travel.nvtimes.com/2007/12/16/travel/16Tikal.html>

Copan, Honduras



<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/bigphotos/78214485.html>

The Maya lived in fear of the destructive nature of their gods. Death rituals became an important part of their religion. Priests and kings conducted their blood sacrifices at the tops of the temple steps and blood from the victims would flow down the steps to the plaza below. The Mayans were not as blood thirsty as the Aztecs but it is known that human sacrifices were common.²⁴ Some captives were subjected to the double sacrifice where the victims heart was torn out for the sun and head cut off to pour blood out for the earth.²⁵

Though there are no traces for specific cemeteries, the noble family members were buried underneath the plazas of the palaces.

These great plazas represented the sea of the beginning of life. During the rituals they were using burning incense and smoke, they danced, including kings, nobles and peasants. Dance was one way of being transformed from god to man or from man to god. It helped to witness the spiritual and supernatural realm. The ecstatic trance was the peak religious experience, the upper class was gathering, drinking hot tea to get high.²⁶ There were ~40 hallucinogenic plants used in Mesoamerica.²⁷

²⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maya_death_rituals

²⁵ <http://www.crystalinks.com/mayanhistory.html>

²⁶ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_4uoVweIBmc

²⁷ "Lost Kingdoms of the Maya", G. S. Stuart, George E. Stuart ; The National Geographic Society, Washington, 1993, p.47-48

Main functions, rituals

- Multi-purpose use

Religious

Educational

Cultural

Economical



en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Brihadeeswarar_Temple_02.jpg

Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, South India



en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Big_Temple-Temple_Entrance.jpg

Apart from being one of the biggest landowners, the temples also employed several artisans, musicians, priests, etc.

They also gave loan to cultivators, traders, artisans with an interesting ranging between in return for various articles, given twelve to fifteen percent.

The temples emerged as a centres of education, the medium of education was Sanskrit. The village assemblies hold their meetings in temples courtyards. All social gatherings, religious rituals and ceremonies were held in temple premises. This indicated the importance of temples in the social and religious life of the people of south India.

The temple also encouraged art and culture. The dancers and the artisans were employed by the temples. They also employed men and women dedicated to temple service. It is interesting to note that there were 400 dancers, their gurus and orchestras employed by the Brihadishvara temple in Thanjavur.¹¹

¹¹ "Longman history and civics", V. Singh, J Dillhon, S. Basu, G. Shanmugavel, New Delhi 2010, p.104

Symbols

- 25 stelaes – great monolithic monuments
- Altars – drum-shaped stones



- Main symbols:
 - kings
 - serpent
 - 2-headed dragon
 - jaguar
 - turtle

Copan, Honduras



<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cop%C3%A1n>

The platforms were adorned with **stelae** and **altars**. Stelae were tall stone monuments, there are about 25 of them, and altars which were smaller and rounded. They both depicted historical events and the likeness of kings. There are various kinds of animals depicted and the human figures represent warriors, rulers, priests or god impersonators. In addition, there were wooden stakes that held the heads of sacrificed victims.²⁸

²⁸ "The Landscape of Man", Jeffrey ad Susan Jellicoe, New York,1975, p. 101

Symbols

- Elephant
- Shiva lingam
- Statue of Nandi



www.superstock.co.uk/stock-photos-images/1890-10376



www.dreamstime.com/stock-images-elephant-blessing-people-with-the-trunk-image9252634

Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, South India



www.superstock.co.uk/stock-photos-images/1890-10376

Inside the inner courtyard, the Nandi-mandapa, a pavilion which houses the colossal statue of Nandi, the bull mounted by Shiva (*vahana*), is of very great interest.¹²

On the way out, we see the temple elephant blessing people who give it a coin by tapping them on their head.¹³

An interpretation suggests that the Lingam represents the beginningless and endless Samba pillar, symbolizing the infinite nature of Shiva. According to another interpretation, the Lingam has also been considered a symbol of male creative energy or of the phallus.¹⁴

¹² <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/250>

¹³ <http://richardarunachala.wordpress.com/2011/02/23/brihadisvara-temple-in-thanjavur-tanjore/>

¹⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lingam>

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