

Michael Coe, The Maya

Students Name

Institutional Affiliation

Course Number and Name

Professors Name

Date

Michael Coe, The Maya

The kingdom of Maya is one of the most significant kingdoms when considering early civilization. The kingdom occupied a vast territory that included northern Central America and Southeastern Mexico. The area included all the territory currently incorporated into modern Belize, Guatemala, and western portions of El Salvador and Honduras. The kingdom comprised many cities, including Uxmal, Piedras Negras, Palenque, Bonampak, Calakmul, Copan, and Tikal. This paper focuses on the Tikal and Copan cities with a special interest in where, how, and when the cities rose and fell. It will also consider the evidence on the artistic and technological achievements.

Tikal

Tika was formed in modern-day Northern Guatemala's Petén Province. Though the city may have been settled by at least 600 b.c, most of its edifices were established during the classical period of Maya history; 250 to 900 a,d (Michael D.Coe & Stephen Houston, n.d.). Tikal was formed when Maya architects designed broad, short temples with stairs bordered by massive stucco masks. Plaster made by burning and powdering limestone was built around stone apertures into elaborate deity faces. The Stela is comprised of tall carved stone.

The city is a major Pre-Columbian military, economic, and political center. An inner urban zone of the city was approximately four hundred hectares and contained the principal monumental architecture as well as monuments that included large and small squares, roads, terraces, ball game courts, small and medium-sized residences, ceremonial platforms, temples as well as palaces (Michael D.Coe & Stephen Houston, n.d.). Most of the city's monuments preserve ornate surfaces, plus mural paintings and stone carvings. The paintings have

hieroglyphic impressions and exemplify the city's dynastic history and relationships with important urban centers like Caracol in Belize, Copan, Teotihuacan, and Calakmul in Mexico. The city's peripheral areas served as Slash and burn/swidden agricultural areas producing food for the dense population.

Various factors contributed to the rise of Tikal. One of these factors is Slash and burn/swidden agriculture. This technique helped create arable land for farming. The people planted maize and secondary crops such as tobacco, squash, and beans. Available food was a key factor in the growth of the city. The terraced sloped on the mountains provided high fields free from flooding. The other factor is cultural growth courtesy of Popul Vuh. This is celebrated as one of the most critical pieces of Mayan literature.

Trade played a critical role in the growth of Tikal city. Similar to modern cities, trade is a determinant of growth. Chief staples of the city's economic activities were centered around food like vegetables, turkey, beans, honey, corn, yams, squash, fish, raw materials such as gold, copper, wood, jade, marble, and limestone. Other products included manufactured goods such as weapons, toys, carvings, clothing, jewelry, furniture, books, paper, and luxury goods.

Despite the rise, the city also suffered a fall. Some of the most contributing factors to the fall of the city include the Maya conflict and war, extended drought shifting trade routes, environmental degradation, overpopulation, and the decline of the Classic era. Towards the end of the classical period, the increasing droughts caused famine and caused an escalation of tensions between Tikal and other cities. This led to warfare that precipitated the city's decline.

There is much archeological evidence of the existence of the city. The Tikal archeological site or park is located in Northern Guatemala's Petén Province; a region referred to

as Maya Forest that extends into neighboring Belize and Mexico (Michael D.Coe & Stephen Houston, n.d.). The city is one of the most archeological complexes left by the Mayan civilization. May monuments in the park preserve decorated surfaces, including mural paintings and stone carvings. The mural paintings have hieroglyphic inscriptions illustrating the dynastic history of the city and the surrounding cities (Michael D.Coe & Stephen Houston, n.d.). Approximately one thousand two hundred hectares, a wider zone of the city's archeological significance, covers water reservoirs and residential areas called "Aguada."

Copan

Copan is also an ancient Mayan city located near the Guatemalan border in modern-day western Honduras. The city was established on the west bank of the Copan River, approximately fifty-six kilometers or thirty-five miles west of the modern Santa Rosa de Copán (Michael D.Coe & Stephen Houston, n.d.). It was ruled by a dynasty of sixteen kings between A.D 426 and 820. Its official emblem was the shape of a bat. The city began as a small agricultural settlement around 1000 BCE (Coe & Houston, n.d.). It later became a critical Maya city during the classic period. It attained its peak growth in the early 9th Century. The city may have been home for approximately twenty thousand people. Even though the city was occupied for more than two thousand years, its ruin complex was mostly built between 400 and 800 AD.

Like Tikal, Copan's rise can be attributed to agriculture, trade, culture, religion, and cosmology (Michael D.Coe & Stephen Houston, n.d.). The fertile soils supported agriculture. The availability of food sparked a population explosion. There was also surplus food for trade. The trees from the forests provided building materials. People established villages that later grew into larger towns and cities. The architecture also played a critical growth in the city's growth. The

houses were built using andesitelocal tufa as well as limestone blocks faced with stucco and cemented with mud.

The city's fall can be attributed to the same factors that led to the fall of Tikal city. These include the Maya conflict and war, extended drought shifting trade routes, environmental degradation, overpopulation, and the decline of the Classic era (Michael D.Coe & Stephen Houston, n.d.). Towards the end of the classical period, the increasing droughts caused famine and caused an escalation of tensions between Copan and other cities. This led to warfare that precipitated the city's decline.

There is rich archeological evidence of Copan city. The major discoveries made at the site where the city was located hieroglyphic stairway confirming the first king's identity. The second discovery is "the Motmot marker," a stone marker that features the founding king and his son (Michael D.Coe & Stephen Houston, n.d.). Among the city's ruins is acerved stone alter depicting the sixteen rulers of the Maya kingdom of Copan. Archeologists discovered two-superimposed tombs, one holding the remains of an elderly man and a woman (Michael D.Coe & Stephen Houston, n.d.). They were both surrounded by ceramic offerings and numerous jade. The bone analysis of the man showed that he was from Tikal. The woman was, however, from Copen. The archeologists concluded that the tomb belonged to dynastic legends.

References

Michael D.Coe & Stephen Houston. The Maya: <https://files.fm/f/9kcha5pcv>