



International

Lost King of the Maya

1 x 60



Lost King of the Maya

1 x 60

CONTACT

Tom Koch, *Director*
WGBH International
125 Western Avenue
Boston, MA 02134 USA

Tel 617-300-3893
Fax 617-300-1021
tom_koch@wgbh.org
www.wgbh.org/international

NOVA's camera follows the track of a narrow flashlight beam in pitch darkness, as anthropologist Robert Sharer threads his way through a dank, man-made tunnel. The passageway runs 130 feet beneath the surface of a giant stone temple mound. Here, at the site of Copan, the mound was, until recently, almost obliterated by the dense Honduran jungle. As the archaeologists constructed the tunnel through the mound, they discovered they were cutting through the remains of one temple after another, each one erected on top of the last by the successive Maya kings of Copan.

Now, Sharer nears the heart of the mound. As we follow in his footsteps, we travel back in time through the 400-year "layer cake" of temples, back to the era of the original founder. The flashlight beam flickers across the damp walls, some carved with the strange, intricate forms of Maya hieroglyphs. Sharer rounds a corner, and there is his great discovery, captured by NOVA's cameras: a shallow grave in the rock, containing the jade-covered bones of a middle-aged man. Could this be the legendary man whom the Maya of Copan revered for sixteen generations—the warrior, king, and Blood Lord they called Yax Kuk Mo?

Any royal grave is a spectacular discovery, yet the finding of this burial comes at a momentous time for Maya archaeologists. Over the last decade, a cascade of breakthroughs in deciphering Maya hieroglyphs has transformed our understanding of their exotic, cultivated, and often violent society. Reading the glyphs has led to the recovery of centuries of vanished history. Now we know the names of rulers, the details of their alliances, conquests, and defeats, the dates of their battles and blood sacrifices, and their relationships to the bizarre pantheon of Maya gods.

The new picture of their society is full of paradoxes. Their skywatchers were capable of recording the motions of the moon with an accuracy that was unequalled until Victorian times. Yet their kings tortured prisoners by ripping out their nails and regularly pierced their own bodies to shed the sacrificial blood demanded by the gods.

For over twenty years, archaeologists Bill Fash, Robert Sharer and their colleagues have been revealing the secrets of Copan. They have now recovered the names, dates, and major events in the reigns of 16 kings stretching over four centuries. This systematic scientific work has had a profound impact on thinking about the ancient Maya and has never been fully explored on television before NOVA's cameras came to Copan.

Besides this unique new light on Copan's beginnings, Fash has found fresh clues about the final crisis that eventually overtook the dynasty and toppled rulers throughout the Maya cities. NOVA's exploration of the turbulent Maya world will present the latest findings in one of archaeology's fastest moving, most provocative fields.

NOVA®

CREDITS

Executive Producer: Paula A. Apsell

Producers: Gary Glassman/Providence Pictures

Cover photo credit: Gary Glassman/Providence Pictures



International

01.12.087