



# Royal Cities of the Ancient Maya

*Michael D Coe*

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The Maya are of enormous and abiding fascination to anybody interested in archaeology, ancient history, astronomy, or the visual arts. From the 3rd century BC to the 14th century AD, while Europe was deep in the Dark and Middle Ages, the Maya were producing astonishing sculpture, stelae, and wall murals, and building magnificent temples, palaces, tombs, and ball courts. Now, in this extraordinary volume pairing a leading Maya scholar and one of the world's finest photographers of ancient sites, the rich cultural heritage of the Maya is brought vividly and authoritatively to life.

Author Michael Coe traces the rise and fall of Maya civilization through its great royal cities, from El Mirador, the largest and oldest, to the rival city-states of the Classical period such as Tikal, Calakmul, Yaxchilán, Palenque, Toniná, and Copán. He then moves on to the great cities of the Terminal Classic period; at a time when the mighty centers of the southern lowlands were in a steep decline, cities to the north such as Uxmal and Kabah achieved a pinnacle of architectural beauty. After that he turns to the Postclassic period and Chichén Itzá in central Yucatán, a huge, cosmopolitan city that flourished during a military and cultural takeover by the Toltecs of central Mexico. Through convincing analysis of archaeological evidence, new readings, of artifacts, reliefs, and murals, Professor Coe untangles the complex sequences of internecine ritual warfare that eventually weakened Maya civilization.

Illustrating Coe's riveting history of these remarkable polities, the powerful dynasties that led them, and the political intrigues and armed conflicts that threatened their existence, are the exceptionally evocative photographs of Barry Brukoff, whose color and sepia imagery recalls the lithographs of the early-nineteenth-century artist and explorer Frederick Catherwood.

### Praise for *Royal Cities of the Ancient Maya*:

"This book takes us on a three-thousand-year journey through Maya history, from nascent agrarian communities to coastal shrines of Yucatán on the eve of the Spanish conquest. Along the way, we visit the major centers of ancient Maya civilization, and in each locale we are given a unique private tour of its remarkable art and architecture through Barry Brukoff's masterly photographs. Our guide on this epic journey is Michael Coe, whose vivid account is informed by vast knowledge of Mesoamerican culture. *Royal Cities of the Ancient Maya* is an experience not to be missed."—Professor Andrea Stone, Department of Art History, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

"A sumptuous presentation of all things Maya. The architecture, art, and history of this extraordinary people are covered in great detail, from the first farmers to the arrival of the Spaniards. During this long interval of some 3500 years, the Maya created one of the most distinctive of ancient civilizations, here wonderfully revealed by Michael Coe, a leading authority in the field, and the superb photographs of Barry Brukoff. *Royal Cities of the Ancient Maya* is a feast for the eye and the mind for the scholar and the general reader alike."—Dr. David L. Webster, Professor of Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania

"Stunning photographs by Barry Brukoff illuminate insights and smart prose from Michael Coe, one of the most knowledgeable scholars of the ancient Maya, in *Royal Cities of the Ancient Maya*. For both general readers and specialists, this highly readable book offers wonderful surprises, along with the latest and most up-to-date interpretations. No bookshelf should be without it."—Dr. Mary Miller, Dean of Yale College, Sterling Professor of Art, History of Art of the Ancient New World, author of *The Art of Mesoamerica: From Olmec to Aztec*

"This book is glorious. Panoramic in two senses, it offers masterful commentary by Michael Coe, doyen of Mayanist scholars, along with B

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