

◀Research Note▶

The Collapse of Classic Maya Civilization Viewed from the Southeast Area

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The focus of this paper is the collapse of Classic Civilization in the central and southern Maya lowlands. My argument here is principally based on the epigraphic, iconographic, and archaeological data from the southeast area, including the preliminary results of my own investigations in the site of Las Pilas, Honduras.

Recently there is a growing tendency among the Mayanists in which it has been claimed that “the Classic Maya Collapse that wasn’t” based on the investigations in the Puuc region of the northwest Yucatan, Mexico and some parts of Belize. However, my careful examination of the data from Copan and its periphery of the southeast area refutes this opinion and shows the following;

(1) After the capture and decapitation of “18 Rabbit”, 13th king of Copan dynasty by “Cauac-Sky” of Quirigua at 738 A.D., subordinate elites in the Copan valley had increasingly gained much political power and authority because of the new power-sharing strategy of Copan rulers with them.

(2) The archaeological investigations in Las Pilas, one of the most prominent secondary centers of Copan have demonstrated that subordinate rulers of secondary centers in the periphery also had increasingly gained much political and (possibly economic) power and authority in the reign of “Yax Pasah”, the 16th ruler of Copan.

(3) The phenomenon that the internal tension between the supreme ruler of the Maya polity and subordinate elites and rulers had been augmented considerably toward the 9th century was universal in the whole central and southern lowlands and internal conflicts and warfare among the divided peer polities seem to have occurred.

These points lead me to the hypothesis that behind the collapse of Classic Civilization there was long-term internal tension in the whole central and southern Maya lowlands, and under this situation the interdependence among the galactic polities through the lattice network of the ruling elites finally created a domino effect that accelerated the process of the Classic Maya Collapse.

(Key Words): Classic Maya Collapse, Subordinate Rulers, Secondary Centers, Internal Tension, Lattice Network.