



# **In Search of Maya Sea Traders (Texas A&M University Anthropology Series)**

*Heather McKillop*

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Stone temples rising above the rainforest canopy and elaborate hieroglyphs carved onto stone monuments give silent testimony to the high culture of the Maya ancestors of the indigenous peoples of Central America. They have inspired generations of archaeologists, professional and avocational, to take to the field in search of the past.

One such archaeologist is Heather McKillop, who in 1979 first visited the coast of Belize in search of a little-known aspect of ancient Maya life: the sea trade that helped move salt, obsidian, coral, and other goods around the interior of the empire. In 1982, she began bringing volunteers and students to the islands off the coast of Port Honduras, Belize. Since then she has returned many times to excavate sites that reveal the scope and diversity of the trade that passed by water throughout the Maya world.

In this book, McKillop tells the story of the search for the Maya sea traders, as well as the story of the traders themselves as it emerges from the excavations. *In Search of Maya Sea Traders* describes the trading port of Wild Cane Cay, where exotic obsidian, jade, gold, and other goods—including highly crafted pots—were traded from distant lands. McKillop also tells us about the more coastal-inland trade of salt, seafood, and other marine resources.

Through the story of her own work and that of her students and volunteers, McKillop models both the research design and the field work that are required to interpret the civilizations of the past. She includes the adventure of discovery, the challenges of working in wild environments (from snakes and rising sea levels to falling coconuts) and the tedium of daily measured digs in a near-tropical setting. Through her experiences, the reader also gets to know some of the local residents of Port Honduras and Wild Cane Cay, descendants of the ancient Maya.

*In Search of Maya Sea Traders* will appeal to that part of each of us that longs to explore distant places and cultures, in quest of a seldom-glimpsed past.

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