

Human Adaptation in Ancient Mesoamerica: Empirical Approaches to Mesoamerican Archaeology. Nancy Gonlin and Kirk D. French, eds.

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Since the mid-twentieth century, ecological and evolutionary approaches have been foundational to our understanding of Mesoamerican prehistory. In Nancy Gonlin and Kirk French's edited volume honoring the Maya archaeologist David Webster, what was old is new again in papers derived from, and elaborating upon, his varied interests in ecosystems and complex societies. If the book has an argument, it is simply this: that cultural ecology broadly understood has been enormously generative of new ideas and data, and that Webster is one of its foremost practitioners. There is more, of course: the subtitle indicates that the contributors share a science-oriented, empirical focus. They do, and the book hangs together because of it. The contributors also share a connection with Penn State's Department of Anthropology and with Webster, who began teaching there in 1972.

The book is mostly about the Maya of the Classic period, including Copan and other sites where Webster has spent much of the past 40 years, but it also makes brief excursions to Teotihuacan and the Mixteca Alta. I liked the structure of the book, beginning with George Milner's literate and entertaining foreword and the editors' introduction, which places Webster in a line of descent, with Gordon Willey as apical ancestor, Richard E. W. Adams as graduate advisor, Pedro Armillas and Robert Braidwood as mentors and instructors, and especially William Sanders as Penn State colleague and collaborator. It is easy to see where Webster's settlement surveys and household excavations come from, but also why he calls himself "an anthropologist who happens to be an archaeologist who happens to be a Mayanist" (p. 337). Webster's intellectual pursuits are traceable ultimately to ethnologists such as Julian Steward and Leslie White.

Nine substantive chapters follow, several from Webster's former students. Those contributions will be of interest primarily to Mayanists; they include simulation studies (internally logical, but unconvincing if not tested in the field) and a recurring "long time-frame" argument for the Maya collapse (which among other things, would preclude drought as a prime mover). All of the chapters are strong, but a few stand out for me. Susan Evans and Deborah Nichols (Chapter 2) discuss Teotihuacan's hydrological underpinnings, and its connection with water symbolism and royal authority. Stephen Whittington and Nancy Gonlin (Chapter 6) integrate settlement archaeology with Mixtec ethnohistory, using the late-sixteenth-century *Mapa de Teozacoalco* as a guide. Kirk Straight (Chapter 10) situates a neutron activation analysis of pottery into successively wider frames of reference to understand economic activity at Tikal. Studies such as these, multidimensional, integrative, and, where possible, bringing together both emic and etic perspectives, are revealing of both culture and ecology.

The book ends with two must-read reflections: one from Webster, about field projects in Copan, Tikal, and other sites, but also about research questions and theory. He makes our choices clear in an era of “anything-goes” postmodernism. Those observations are perhaps not unrelated to his view that ideologies are oftentimes maladaptive (and that an obsession with maize may have contributed to the Classic Maya demise). Regardless, the interested student will find a dozen or so potential dissertation topics in this chapter. The other is from Don and Prudence Rice, a thought-provoking reflection on scholarly networks, and their own research trajectories. I found myself thinking about disciplinary training and the current state of anthropology throughout the book. It is hard to imagine another Webster coming along in the future, and that is unfortunate.

Human Adaptation is readable, accessible, seemingly error-free, and looks good on a shelf with other University Press of Colorado books. But is that enough to recommend it? Festschrifts are notoriously uneven, limited in scope, and rarely worth the trouble of being opened. More often than not, one wishes instead for an annotated collection of the honoree’s writings. In the present instance, the reader might further ask whether the book is too nostalgic about Penn State. The downside of our “invisible colleges” (Rice and Rice) is the tunnel vision that might arise from it. Still, the book transcends the limitations of its genre. Webster is widely known and read by Mayanists and non-Mayanists alike. This book elucidates the reasons for those achievements.

ANDREW K. BALKANSKY, *Southern Illinois University, Carbondale*

Political Strategies in Pre-Columbian Mesoamerica. Sarah Kurnick and Joanne Baron, eds. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2016, 288 pp. \$60.00, cloth. ISBN 978-1-60732-415-7.

This volume is the result of a Society for American Archaeology session designed, as the editors state, to stimulate discussion and debate about “the processes associated with the creation, perpetuation, and negation of politically authoritative relationships” (xv), and to a great extent the volume succeeds.

In her introductory section, Kurnick eschews long chapter summaries, instead presenting an interesting, dense review of theoretical positions related to a central theme: the contradictions inherent in rulership. She uses Max Weber’s definition of authority: the idea that, most likely, a given group of people will obey specific commands, and that those people have an interest in complying. Authority in turn implies legitimacy. She sees this Weberian view as compatible with agency theory but asks a crucial question: Is any modern political theory applicable to the past, or are current theories of