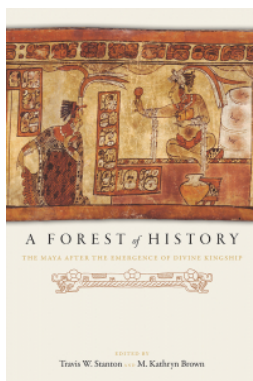




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Travis W. Stanton and M. Kathryn Brown (eds.), *A Forest of History.* The Maya after the Emergence of Divine Kingship

Chloé Andrieu
[mailto:Chloe.ANDRIEU@cnrs.fr]

Archéologie des Amériques (UMR 8096), CNRS-université de Paris 1
Panthéon-Sorbonne

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1. *A Forest of History* is presented as a reflection on archeology 30 years after the publication of *A Forest of Kings. The Untold Story of the Ancient Maya* (Schele and Freidel, 1990, Quill, New York), but also as a tribute to this book which had been severely criticized when it was released but is now one of the classics of Maya archeology. Its degree of synthesis, its particular form, including the different levels of narration, which combine very precise footnotes, with lyrical stories and personal testimony, made it a bestseller. Above all, the book marked a paradigm shift to the systematic introduction of epigraphy in the construction of the Mayan historical narrative. *A Forest of History* therefore takes up the main



Emergence of Divine

Kingship, University of
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Louisville, 2020,
331 p., bibliogr., index,
ill. (in black and white),
photos, maps, tab.

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Orcid

[0000-0001-5952-0332](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5952-0332)

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termination deposits, still mark the paradigms of Maya research today. In fact, this category applies admirably to the understanding of the contexts of violent abandonment of the Cancuen palace. Two articles take up the notion of stranger-kings, which is surprising because that is not a term developed in *A Forest of King*, although the book was certainly one of those that has helped to establish theories of sacred royalty to the Mayan area. Chase and Chase (Chap. 3) thus propose that two kings of Caracol could have dominated Tikal following their victory over this site, where they would have ruled as stranger-kings and would have been buried. However, this hypothesis, largely supported by iconographic and ceramic data, comes up against the sole objection that the names of the rulers do not correspond from one site to another —although there is the possibility that the same king could have use several names, as Freidel points out (Chap. 14). The interesting aspect of the discussion lies in the head-on tackling of an essential and still unresolved question, concerning the nature of the relations between defeated and victorious cities after a war, and providing a completely new hypothesis. Marcus (Chap. 4), takes up the personal nature of power and political motivations developed in *A Forest of Kings*, and suggests reading the concept of stranger-king in the light of a usurper who comes from elsewhere and interrupts a dynasty. This allows her to raise the question of the influence of Teotihuacan in the Mayan area, and the various forms it

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in the creation and maintenance of the Kaanul political structures (Navarro-Farr, Pérez Robles, Menéndez, and Pérez Calderón, Chap. 5), and constitutes a beautiful exercise, in the tradition of Schele and Freidel, of portraying the two Kaanul queens who reigned in El Peru Waka. By crossing the data from their tombs with iconographic and epigraphic data, the authors address the specificity of the role of women in Mayan politics, but also gender bias on the part of the archaeologists who study them. The other article (Rich and Eppich, Chap. 6) also deals with the strategies of alliance and the identities of the elites from that site, based on the very detailed study of two identical burials, one being undoubtedly royal and the other not, and from the study of the artifacts, showing the possible strategies of alliances and identities between these individuals. The chapter on Yaxchilan (Golden and Scherer, Chap. 7), adds to the reading of the political life of Usumacinta described in *A Forest of King*, together with the question of the Sajals, and analyzes their representation in the regional iconography to show what could be called the manufacturing processes of the rulers, by which they themselves become objects of power linked to the territories they ruled. Chapter 8 also follows *A Forest of Kings* (Ashmore, Chap. 8), by summarizing new data on Copan and Quirigua from the many projects developed in the region since that book's publication.

4. *A Forest of History* continues with chapters devoted to

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narrative of political struggle in Northern Yucatan, while suggesting that the gradual abandonment of Yaxuna contributed to the urbanization of Chichen Itza. Likewise, the chapter on Chichen Itza (Headrick, Chap. 11) challenges the hypothesis then proposed by Freidel and Schele of a multitepal-type government, while addressing the question of the cosmopolitan identity of Chichen and the militarism of the city. Finally, Chapter 12 (Masson, Cruz Alvarado, Peraza Lope and Milbrath) provides a very detailed study of the abandonment deposits in the Izmal Ch'en group of Mayapan, which challenges the hypothesis of a sudden abandonment of that city, suggesting, on the contrary, the idea of several successive crises spanning a period of more than 50 years.

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5. The notion of sacred geography which structures *A Forest of Kings*, is put in the spotlight with the chapter by Taube (Chap. 10) which is a fascinating iconographic analysis of the exchanges of representations of the motifs of warrior butterflies and flowered mountains between the central Mexican world and the Maya Lowlands, implying that Mesoamericans had shared representations of their sacred geography as well as of themselves. Finally, and equally daring, Chapter 13 by Gunter offers a re-reading of the Mayan interpretation of cycle 8 Ahaw, described in Chilam Balam's books as the Katun of destruction and of the end, and suggests that other 8 Ahaw cycles were considered in the same way during the Classic period by



career, as well as offering a warm tribute to Linda Schele.

7. This book is therefore a very comprehensive, often daring, and very personal set of syntheses. We might regret the absence of a chapter on Palenque (central to the book and to which homage is paid), or even one on the question of the shaman king, which was one of the great hypotheses of Freidel and Schele and which has given rise to many debates. However, all these aspects may well be developed in the second volume announced by the editors (Stanton and Brown, Chap. 1). Nevertheless, this is a successful ensemble, the authors allow themselves a less academic style, punctuated by personal remarks on their relationship with Schele and Freidel, or the role that book played in their careers, all of which makes for enjoyable reading. Above all, it provides the opportunity for a reflective synthesis on the advances in Mayanist research and its paradigm shifts over the past thirty years, which, as Sabloff underlines in his preface, also shows how much history yet remains to be written.

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