

over the following forty-five years affected coastal societies profoundly. The colonial cases in the volume argue that despite these challenges, maritime communities and identities remained vital and fluid in the face of colonial demands. Traditional fishing communities adapted in dynamic ways to changing regional situations, practicing a range of economies, sometimes adopting agricultural pursuits as required.

Long-term and more acute environmental change, including periodic ENSO events along the Andean coast, would have been well known to coastal communities. While these events are often assumed to have had disastrous effects on local communities, at least in some cases, ENSO may have actually created novel economic environments and opportunities that could be exploited by maritime peoples. Goepfert et al., for example, discuss a local group of inland fishing peoples who were able to take advantage of inland salty la-

goons established during a period of frequent ENSO events. This inland maritime community seems to have processed lagoon species for exchange with groups farther inland.

Andean maritime society is striking in both temporal and geographical variability, underlining the importance of taking the entire coastline into account when discussing maritime adaptation. This volume is far-reaching and presents both data-driven and, at times, theoretically nuanced examples ranging through time from some of the coast's earliest occupations to several examples of Late Pre-Hispanic and colonial-period dynamics. While grounded in the shifting environments within which these societies existed, the papers here do not simply rely on determinist arguments for organization and change. They instead foreground the connections that would have been necessary both between coastal and inland communities and among developing social divisions within coastal societies.

Anthropomorphizing the Cosmos: Middle Preclassic Lowland Maya Figurines, Ritual, and Time by Prudence Rice

Louisville: University Press of Colorado, 2019. 284 pp.

DOI: 10.1111/aman.13546

Richard G. Lesure

University of California, Los Angeles

The ceramic figurines of Preclassic-period Mesoamerica are generally understood to have been used in domestic rituals, but their specific intended purposes remain poorly understood. Scholars tend to provide generalized accounts of function: that figurines were points of reference in the negotiation of social relations or that interactions with figurines contributed to the formation people as subjects. Yet a rising theoretical interest in ancient ontologies renews questions about people's specific intentions and experiences with figurines. Prudence Rice's new book on Middle Preclassic Maya figurines is a provocative contribution to that effort.

Rice's analyses center on 312 fragments from two sites in the Petén Lakes region of Guatemala, Ixlú and Nixtun-Ch'ich'. She describes anthropomorphic figurines, animal effigies, and musical instruments bearing human or animal imagery. An impressive ninety-three pieces are illustrated in stippled drawings executed with an adequate level of skill; one wishes, though, for more of the photos that appear on the front cover. Rice's agenda extends well beyond description. She develops a wide-ranging interpretation with an eclectic theoretical basis. Strands drawn into the argument include the biology of the human face, headdresses of Olmec colossal heads, stylistic and expressive features of Classic

Maya art, and, most extensively, the Maya calendar. Fifteen chapters explore aspects of figurine iconography, context, clay composition, and possible connections with divinatory almanacs.

That last point—the possible links between Middle Preclassic figurines, divination, and the origins of Maya writing—forms the heart of the book. Rice argues that the 260-day calendar and associated rituals are quite ancient. During the Preclassic, modeled ceramic imagery was adopted as a “cognitive mnemonic technology” (p. 115) that made tangible various intangible concepts associated with divination. In a general sense, Preclassic figurines can be seen as a precursor of writing—yet also in a specific sense, since, according to Rice, aspects of the figurines were transferred to the head-variants of numbers and days in the Classic Maya script. The forces centered in the heads of figurines “came to be shorthand embodiments of the components of the almanac” (p. 156). To support her case, Rice draws on various lines of evidence, including the focus of attention on heads among figurines, aspects of physiognomy that figurines share with head-variant glyphs, and embellishments to headdresses based on similar concepts in the two cases.

Rice's interpretations are bold and original. Not surprisingly, many issues could be debated. How much can we reliably read into the details of figurine noses, mouths, and facial profiles? A more detailed consideration of chronology might have helped clarify some interpretations. Rice notes (p. 88) that the heads from Nixtun-Ch'ich' resemble those of Palangana-phase San Lorenzo. That comparison looks

appropriate, and it would favor placement of the bulk of the heads after 800 BC. Absence of deeply punched pupils at Nixtun-Ch'ich' is probably a chronological issue rather than interpretable in relation to the creation myths of the *Popol Vuh*, as Rice suggests. The early Middle Preclassic horizon of deeply punched eyes in the figurines of eastern Mesoamerica (1000–850 BC) is missing at Nixtun-Ch'ich' because the collection of heads postdates that era.

Important questions to ask of any ambitious interpretation of figurines are: Does formal and contextual variability matter? Are its interesting claims subject to empirical scrutiny? And, do those claims help us make sense of variation within and between assemblages? Rice's achievements in this regard are mixed but in several domains impressive. She observes but does not fully account for the suite of distinctive features of the Petén Lakes collection: the prevalence of seated postures, the even balance of probable male and female images, the striking diversity of pastes, and (generally for the Maya Lowlands) the uneven occurrence and lower

frequencies of figurines. By emphasizing that figurines depict everything in villagers' social worlds, she tends to downplay systematic efforts to distinguish among those based on variability in the collection. Yet Rice also makes innovative strides towards empirical engagement with a key set of claims: that individual figurines were experienced as social beings; that, collectively, they anthropomorphized the cosmos; and that figurines constituted a mnemonic technology that influenced the development of Maya writing. She gives welcome empirical attention to the question of intentional breakage (a claim too often simply asserted and then treated as proven). Her iconographic comparisons of figurines and Classic Maya graphemes are extensive and detailed. That work has exciting theoretical and analytical implications: it establishes a new empirical domain for enriching the common suggestion that figurines were used in domestic rituals. This book should be read and debated by those interested in visual culture, materiality, ritual, and writing in Preclassic Mesoamerica.

Deadline: Populism and the Press in Venezuela by Robert Samet

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019. 244 pp.

DOI: 10.1111/aman.13549

Steve Ellner

Universidad de Oriente

Numerous scholarly works label Hugo Chávez a radical populist, but this one is unique in arguing that both the Venezuelan president and the movement that opposed his government were characterized by populist features. Robert Samet notes that “conventional accounts” (p. 6) associate the Venezuelan opposition with liberal democracy, not populism, but the ability of Chávez's adversaries to unite in spite of their heterogeneity and lack of “any form of ideological coherence” (p. 95) is typical of populist movements. A related characteristic of populism is its tendency to polarize. Samet points out that not only did Chávez set off polarization but the nation's opposition as well. Samet rejects the “narrowly” (p. 11) defined view of populism as a top-down phenomenon centering on a charismatic leader and instead takes a bottom-up approach in line with Ernesto Laclau's writing, which posits that the salient characteristics of populist movements are molded by the rank and file.

Samet applies this thesis to crime journalism in Caracas under the governments of Chávez and his successor, Nicolás Maduro. The book highlights the increased utilization by journalists of the denunciations (*denuncias*) formulated by victims and their families. This “shift toward crime victims

as news sources” (p. 65) lends itself to theories of populism and particularly that of Laclau in several ways. First, by relying less on top-down police accounts and largely on bottom-up *denuncias*, crime beat reporters “created the semblance of the popular will” (p. 122) and removed intermediaries, both basic tendencies of populist movements. Second, as Laclau envisioned in *On Populist Reason*, the victims' grievances get transformed into other issues, such as censorship, corruption, poverty, and the deficiencies of public services, that went beyond the problem of crime and in certain circumstances “could even help topple governments” (p. 10). Third, Samet, using a term largely associated with Laclau, states that the *denuncias* are “the vehicles through which chains of equivalences take shape.” This process leads to cross-class alliances, a prominent feature of populist movements. Finally, Samet points to the vividness of crime reporting and photography, which has a direct, unmediated impact. He concludes that the “immediacy of crime news intersects with the immediacy of populism” in a “way that few other genres do” (p. 17).

Samet devotes an entire chapter to the unresolved assassination of press photographer Jorge Tortoza on the day of the coup against Chávez on April 11, 2002. The private media (which was completely aligned with the opposition) and state media presented diametrically opposed versions of the incident, but in doing so, according to Samet, converged in