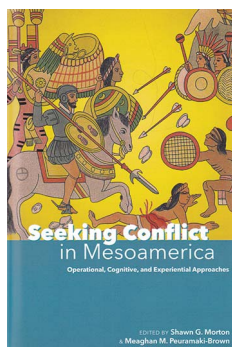


SHAWN G. MORTON & MEAGHAN M. PEURAMAKI-BROWN (ed.). 2019. *Seeking conflict in Mesoamerica: operational, cognitive, and experiential approaches*. Louisville: University Press of Colorado; 978-1-60732-886-5 hardback \$79.



Morton and Peuramaki-Brown's edited volume addresses what they identify as a long-standing gap in scholarly knowledge of Mesoamerica: the understanding of conflict. The editors' stated intention is that the volume should build on earlier important works on Mesoamerican conflict, while at the same time approaching the subject from a unique perspective. The aim is "to understand how the Maya themselves—along with their Mesoamerican neighbors—understood and explained conflict, what they recognized as conflict, how conflict was experienced by various parties, and the circumstances surrounding conflict" (p. 4). Articles in the volume take a localised approach, focusing on internal and

more subjective Maya sources.

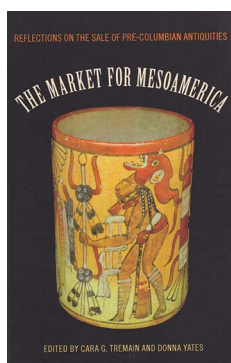
The volume is divided into three broad sections. 'Conflict in the Maya world' (Part I) focuses on the agency of people, objects and places in conflict, and the natural and supernatural forces at work in the processes of conflict. 'Conflict in broader Mesoamerica' (Part II) considers comparative Mesoamerican examples of conflict, particularly in Central Mexico and the Gulf Coast, and the Discussion (Part III) reflects on the processes of conflict addressed by previous chapters and draws out some of the main emergent themes and questions.

One of the standout chapters is that of Hernandez and Palka (Chapter 3), who use the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein in Firdos Square, Baghdad, in 2003, as an example of an act which was not logistically important in terms of the war effort, but which remains one of the enduring images or symbols of the Iraq War. The authors go on to consider the link between Maya warfare and the destruction of images, statues or other material manifestations of supernatural forces. Although these are not argued to be consequential in strategic military terms, they represent the part that culture played in Maya warfare and particularly in victory, which was often marked by destruction of the conquered peoples' sacred spaces and imagery, and of a deliberate severing of the connection between the people and their patron spirit. The authors investigate ethnohistorical examples to understand Indigenous approaches to conflict and warfare and look for continuity in Maya conflict from the pre-Columbian to modern periods. Case studies include the oracular shrines on the islands of Cozumel (off the coast of Yucatán) and Noh Petén, Guatemala; the mass burial—or 'termination site'—at Zacpeten, Guatemala; and another mass burial at Topoxte, on an island in the Petén lakes region. The authors conclude that although people do not necessarily interpret destruction of significant objects and places in the same way, "meaning and symbols are central in war" (p. 46).

The final section (Part III) comprises two chapters that reflect on the findings of the rest of the volume. Travis Stanton (Chapter 11) considers what the volume contributes to current understandings of the origins of conflict and violence, rituals associated with warfare, the

economics of conflict, experience of violence, and the question of who was practising warfare and violence. Stanton calls for a reconsideration of the tendency to view human-against-human violence as warfare or sanctioned ritual sacrifice, and to shift the focus to explorations of the broader social aspects of organised violence. Elizabeth Graham (Chapter 12) also takes a broad view of the concept of ‘war’, wondering whether opposing sides shared the same definition of war, or whether different agendas allowed both sides to achieve benefits. Graham also reflects on the previous chapters, and while many of the themes overlap with those of Stanton, they also include reflection on the concept of winning; war as a way to frame the political landscape, rather than simply gaining territory; the rules of engagement and cultural relativism; and inter-familial conflict and social exclusion. Graham suggests that a useful way forward in understanding Mesoamerican conflict would be to set aside occidental approaches to war and to consider that human sacrifice may have been “sanctioned as an inevitable part of what we today would call war” (p. 246). This volume asks the reader to reconsider their understanding of war and to look at Mesoamerican conflict through the Maya’s own lens. It should also appeal to those considering conflict in the past more broadly.

CARA G. TREMAIN & DONNA YATES (ed.). 2019. *The market for Mesoamerica: reflections on the sale of pre-Columbian antiquities*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida; 978-0-81305-644-9 hardback \$90.



Our final volume considers the region’s heritage in the present and the damage caused to Mesoamerican heritage by the trade in pre-Columbian artefacts. *The market for Mesoamerica* explores the sale and illicit movement of Mesoamerican antiquities across an international market. The volume is diverse and thorough in its coverage, with contributions from experts from a range of disciplines, including museums and law and policy implementation. Related topics span market analysis, forgery detection, museum practice and the enforcement of protection laws. All chapters coalesce around the main theme: how to address the problem of “the destruction of Maya sites by operators in search of marketable sculptures and

more portable objects” (p. 1).

The opening chapter by Rosemary Joyce outlines the current state of affairs, reflecting on what legislative measures have already been put in place (such as the 1970 UNESCO convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property) and how other stakeholders have responded (for example, auction houses avoiding handling objects of uncertain provenance). Joyce also notes, however, that viewing the problem as a market for antiquities masks the broader systemic issues at play, arguing that referring to a Mesoamerican ‘art world’ rather than ‘market’ may provoke more self-reflection on the part of stakeholders, who might—albeit unwittingly—facilitate the trade. For Joyce, the greatest challenge is to effect a change in mind-set, so that owning objects is no longer a desirable goal.