

Book Reviews

General

Classic Maya Political History: Hieroglyphic and Archaeological Evidence. Edited by T. PATRICK CULBERT. School of American Research Advanced Seminar Series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Maps. Tables. Figures. Index. xviii, 396 pp. Cloth. \$54.50.

This volume represents a genuinely important sourcebook for students of ancient Maya civilization and a useful compendium of epigraphic and complementary archaeological data pertaining to the nature and historical dynamics of Classic-era Maya political organization. It presents and intelligently discusses much of what was known and believed regarding Lowland Maya political history as of the late 1980s without the excessively imaginative fictionalization that flaws the other recent treatment of this subject, *A Forest of Kings* (1990), by Linda Schele and David Freidel. This is decidedly, however, a specialist's sourcebook. Unquestionably a vital work for all Mayanists, it is sufficiently specialized and particularizing to rule out any great value for those with a more general interest in such topics as pre-industrial political organization or the historical dynamics of archaic states.

The volume recounts the numerous personal and dynastic histories recorded on Classic Maya monuments of the first millennium A.D., as recently deciphered by Mayan epigraphers. It describes the implications of these texts for the social and political interactions between and within discrete Classic Maya states, and outlines the latest refinements to our developing understanding of Classic Maya civilization and the cultural roles of its ruling elites, as suggested by the inscriptions. Textual intelligence is combined with archaeological data in a useful and informative manner by virtually all the individual authors, and in this respect the book not only embodies what "good" Maya scholarship became during the 1970s and '80s, but illustrates a methodologically sound approach to historical archaeology for any period in any region.

The meat of the volume consists of several individual site histories presented as chapters 3 through 9; but both Mayanists and nonspecialists are likely to find more of interest in the interpretive study of intersite elite interactions by Linda Schele and Peter Mathews (chapter 10) and in Norman Hammond's excellent appraisal of current knowledge of the Classic Maya polity (chapter 11). Well-written lead chapters by Hammond (1) and Mathews (2) introduce the reader to the subject of Classic Maya political history and its epigraphic basis, and T. Patrick Culbert, the volume editor, provides a fine summation and synthetic discussion of the volume's overall content and significance. Without question, this School of American Research Advanced Seminar collection will prove an essential resource and reference for all with a serious interest in ancient Maya civilization.

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Cuello: An Early Maya Community in Belize. Edited by NORMAN HAMMOND. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Photographs. Illustrations. Maps. Graphs. Notes. xxi, 260 pp. Cloth. \$89.50.

Scribes, Warriors, and Kings: The City of Copán and the Ancient Maya. By WILLIAM L. FASH. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991. Photographs. Illustrations. Maps. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. Index. 192 pp. Cloth. \$35.00.

These books report on two of the most important projects conducted in Maya archaeology during the 1970s and 1980s. The Cuello volume, which is highly technical and directed primarily to a professional audience, reports on the excavations at one of the earliest known Maya communities. The Copán book is oriented to professionals and nonprofessionals alike, and presents a synthesis of past and present research at a site often called the Athens of Classic Maya civilization.

The site of Cuello, in northern Belize, has long been in the limelight of Maya archaeology. Archaeologists and specialists in related fields, working under the direction of Norman Hammond of Boston University from 1975 to 1987, reported an initial series of C-14 dates that suggested the community had its beginnings more than four thousand years ago. A subsequent reinterpretation of the chronological data indicates a more recent initial occupation in the final years of the Early Preclassic period, c. 1200–1100 B.C. The site continued to be inhabited throughout the subsequent Middle and Late Preclassic periods (900 B.C.–A.D. 300) and, to a lesser degree, in the following Classic and Postclassic periods (A.D. 300–1400).

Remains of Early and Middle Preclassic settlements are rare in the Maya Lowlands, as they are almost invariably buried under the remains of later communities. In many instances, traces of these early occupations have been exposed only at the bottom of deep probe excavations. The work at Cuello, however, uncovered a substantial portion of one of the earliest sedentary villages in the Maya area, and the data have revealed important new information on early village life in the Mesoamerican tropics.