

Blaeu but actually the work of Hessel Geritz, one of the few professional cartographers who did travel to the New World. A map of Pernambuco by Georg Marcgraf and one of California and the Southwest by Eusebio Kino were included in the exhibition but not reproduced in the book.

Although it does not provide a complete picture of local cartographical knowledge, particularly for Spanish and Portuguese America, the book does a good job of describing how such knowledge of the New World evolved in Western Europe; and the reproductions alone may make it worth having.

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## Background

*Mesoamerican Elites: An Archaeological Assessment*. Edited by DIANE Z. CHASE and ARLEN F. CHASE. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992. Illustrations. Tables. Figures. Notes. Bibliography. Index. xiv, 375 pp. Cloth. \$39.95.

Mesoamericanists have often been criticized (and we have chastised each other) for overemphasizing elite culture, but we are all perfectly aware that the heart and soul of ancient Mesoamerica depended on the thought and behavior of the elites of the many different societies that inhabited the area. Indeed, elite interaction was the most critical factor in culturally unifying the area in Formative times, and continued interaction among elites was a fundamental process in the formation of complex society. A Zapotec lord of Monte Alban, after all, would have had much more in common with a noble from Teotihuacán or Tikal, despite the differences in language or ethnicity, than with the peasant subsistence farmers of Oaxaca who paid him tribute.

Similar considerations led Diane and Arlen Chase to assemble this volume, based primarily on papers presented at the 1987 meeting of the American Anthropological Association. The editors also note ruefully that research on Mesoamerican elites was in danger of being eclipsed by the search for the “common man” and “everyday life” (p. xii). Settlement pattern studies, they observe, have virtually excluded elites from consideration.

The 19 papers included in the book strike a fairly good temporal and spatial balance. About half of them are concerned wholly or in part with the Mayan area. Other regions covered include Oaxaca and Central Mexico. Some key areas, such as West Mexico and the Gulf Coast, are neglected or mentioned only in passing. For the most part, the editors have attempted a blend of theoretical considerations and empirical data summaries, although most of these papers address substantive matters more thoroughly than theoretical issues.

The opening essay, by the Chases, grapples with conceptual issues and methodological problems. One of the basic problems is the archaeological identification of elites through their material culture correlates, which is in turn part of the

larger issue of defining the degree and nature of social ranking and stratification. Comparing archaeological and ethnohistorical data, the Chases conclude that the old model of a very small number of elites controlling social institutions is no longer workable in Mesoamerica. Another thorny issue discussed is the recognition of social classes. Some scholars tend to see only two classes—nobles and commoners—while others are willing to define middle or intermediate classes.

The latter problem is not simply a matter of definition or perception. What is at stake, as Joyce Marcus makes clear in her piece comparing Zapotec and Mayan royal families, is the real structure of ancient Mesoamerican society. Her contribution, based on ethnohistorical data, is characteristically didactic in orientation.

The paper by Stephen Kowalewski, Gary Feinman, and Laura Finsten focuses on the assessment of social stratification through archaeological data. This reviewer agrees with them that Mesoamericanists are guilty of manifold sins of theoretical omission in their handling of this issue. The authors present a methodological survey of various classes of archaeological data from the Valley of Oaxaca, and in a theoretical coda (“Let Us Not Reinvent the Wheel: Lessons from Sociology”) they point out that the wider field of social science contains much that we have missed. This is one of the few papers in the collection that displays any inclination to deal with some of the issues raised by George Marcus in his theoretical discussion, in which he gently encourages Mesoamerican archaeologists to take a closer look at the literature on social theory, especially the works by Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu.

Although space limitations prevent examination of each chapter, a few were especially stimulating to this reviewer. Kenneth Hirth, in a very provocative essay, examines the role of elite behavior in the development of social complexity. Departing from a premise derived from the work of George Marcus, that elite behavior is multifaceted in content and difficult to characterize in terms of how it affects culture change, Hirth narrows the focus to the influence of elites in regional and interregional exchange networks involving primitive valuables (exotic objects and prestige goods such as jade, turquoise, cotton textiles, marine shell, and cacao). His conclusion encourages archaeologists to broaden their understanding of primitive valuables as generalized wealth that creates and reinforces inequality. David Freidel links the iconography of warfare at Chichén Itzá and the northern Maya Lowlands with the Popol Vuh genesis myth in an attempt to document the historical transformation of Maya rulership in the Terminal Classic period. Thomas Charlton and Deborah Nichols examine carefully the archaeological and historical evidence for the identification of elites at Otumba in the Basin of Mexico.

In summary, this book is probably a fair reflection of the current state of research on Mesoamerican elites. Although that research has just begun, I consider the book to be extremely important in providing a stimulus for further work in this area.

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