

Background

Economies and Politics in the Aztec Realm.

Edited by MARY G. HODGE and MICHAEL E. SMITH. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995. Photographs. Maps. Tables. Figures. Bibliography. Index. viii, 478 pp. Paper. \$32.00.

This volume is the most important work on the Aztecs yet in print. It takes a refreshing look at one of the American empires by demolishing the monolithic view of a centralized economy in favor of one of a more complex economic system in which variation and dynamics at the local and regional levels are taken into account.

The editors are to be congratulated for putting together a collection of seventeen high quality essays (unfortunately not organized in a clear manner) by excellent researchers with new and original approaches. The essays are based on papers originally given in a symposium at the 45th International Congress of Americanists (1991). In the first chapter the authors present an excellent introduction to the study of the Late Post-classic period (A.D. 1150–1519) in which they offer an updated review of the main arguments and points of discussion concerning the Aztecs. Outstanding chapters include one on the study of boundaries and territories, which uses archaeological and ethnohistorical data that permits interesting comparisons of the territories of various city-states. There is also a fascinating study of peasant communities during the Late Aztec period (A.D. 1350–1520) that compares data from ethnohistorical records on demography and landholding to data obtained from archaeological research in rural areas. Other chapters that are enlightening in their methodological approach to the study of Aztec economy and political organization focus on the production and distribution of goods such as cloth, lip plugs, figurines, lapidary works, salt, and ceramics. Most of the other chapters contribute to the volume by making the case for the existence of multiple forms of economy that have been obscured by models of interpretation derived from studies focused on Tenochtitlan, the imperial capital of the Aztecs. A new perspective on the rural economy in areas such as that of modern-day Morelos and the Mesoamerican frontier, as well as a study of the effects of a state economy on neighboring domains, complete this new vision of the Aztec Empire. In conclusion, the main value of this book is that it opens up new perspectives on research problems of importance in the comparative study of imperial economies.

AUGUSTO OYUELA-CAYCEDO, Universidad Nacional de Colombia/Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology of the University of Pennsylvania