



Journal de la Société
des Américanistes

Journal de la société des américanistes

93-1 | 2007
tome 93, n° 1

ARNAULD Charlotte, Véronique BREUIL-MARTÍNEZ y
Érick PONCIANO ALVARADO, *La Joyanca (La Libertad,
Guatemala): antigua ciudad maya del noroeste del
Petén*, Centro Francés de Estudios Mexicanos y
Centroamericanos (CEMCA), México D.F. /
Asociación Tikal, Ciudad de Guatemala / Centro de
Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica
(CIRMA), Antigua Guatemala, 2004, 138 p. + 16 pl.
coul. + cédérom, bibl., gloss., index, ill., carte, plan,
photos

Arthur A. Demarest



Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/jsa/7313>
ISSN: 1957-7842

Publisher

Société des américanistes

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 December 2007
ISSN: 0037-9174

Electronic reference

Arthur A. Demarest, « ARNAULD Charlotte, Véronique BREUIL-MARTÍNEZ y Érick PONCIANO ALVARADO, *La Joyanca (La Libertad, Guatemala): antigua ciudad maya del noroeste del Petén*, Centro Francés de Estudios Mexicanos y Centroamericanos (CEMCA), México D.F. / Asociación Tikal, Ciudad de Guatemala / Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica (CIRMA), Antigua Guatemala, 2004, 138 p. + 16 pl. coul. + cédérom, bibl., gloss., index, ill., carte, plan, photos », *Journal de la société des américanistes* [Online], 93-1 | 2007, Online since 23 January 2008, connection on 06 May 2019.
URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/jsa/7313>

This text was automatically generated on 6 May 2019.

© Société des Américanistes

ARNAULD Charlotte, Véronique
BREUIL-MARTÍNEZ y Érick PONCIANO
ALVARADO, *La Joyanca (La Libertad,
Guatemala): antigua ciudad maya del
noroeste del Petén*, Centro Francés de
Estudios Mexicanos y
Centroamericanos (CEMCA), México
D.F. / Asociación Tikal, Ciudad de
Guatemala / Centro de
Investigaciones Regionales de
Mesoamérica (CIRMA), Antigua
Guatemala, 2004, 138 p. + 16 pl. coul.
+ cédérom, bibl., gloss., index, ill.,
carte, plan, photos

Arthur A. Demarest

- 1 This concise, thorough, and beautifully produced volume is one of the very few studies of a small site of the ancient Maya civilization of the Classic period (AD 300-900). It fills a

major gap in the study of Classic Maya sites and is a volume that every Maya archaeologist should read.

- 2 Maya archaeology, in general, has not been as theoretically and methodologically sophisticated as other subfields of archaeology and anthropology. Perhaps it is because of this traditionalist approach that excavations and publications have focused almost exclusively on the great cities. Smaller centers are examined only superficially and only in terms of their relation to the large centers. Those small centers that have been studied, have not been investigated by large scale multi-disciplinary teams.
- 3 In contrast, the La Joyanca report demonstrates the importance of what is referred to in modern archaeology as «The Small Site Methodology». This approach tries to thoroughly elucidate the nature of smaller centers in order to allow a more complete analysis which then can be used to interpret features at the larger and more complex sites which are less easily sampled and are far more difficult to objectively interpret. This report exemplifies the best features and importance of this neglected small site strategy.
- 4 Every aspect of culture at La Joyanca is examined in depth in this report on the excavations, the ecological and settlement studies, and the analyses by a multi-institutional team of scholars led by the eminent French archaeologist Charlotte Arnaud.
- 5 The basic core element of chronology is reconstructed by Arnauld and Forné by a meticulous ceramic study of over 97,000 potsherds using both type-variety and modal methods. Independent analyses based on radiocarbon and stratigraphy are correlated to provide a very reliable cross-check on dates of all contexts. As in all the chapters, there is more than sufficient information on chronology for scholars to review and critique the interpretations.
- 6 The subsequent two chapters by Arnauld, Breuil-Martínez, Ponciano, and the La Joyanca settlement and ecology teams, present and analyze the regional settlement patterns and the intra-site residential occupation at La Joyanca and in its immediate region. Special emphasis is given to the internal hierarchy of elite and sub-elite residential palaces of the site's late florescence from AD 600 to 850.
- 7 Of particular interest in these chapters is the strange Late Classic displacement of La Joyanca's agricultural support system from a fertile «meseta» to the south to the vicinity of the site or even its residential core. This shift in viith and viiith century settlement contrast with what occurs at many other centers, large and small, in the Maya lowlands. This could reflect both greater reliance on household infield gardening (as argued in this text), but could also be due to reliance on external food support, as seen in this period in sites ranging in size from large (e.g. Dos Pilas), to medium (e.g. Cancuen), to small (e.g. Arroyo de Piedra). In all of these centers, basic agricultural activities are moved out of the site core into adjacent zones. While the La Joyanca text argues primarily for the shift to infield gardens, the reasons for this change at other sites appears to relate more to external political forces, to greater reliance on tribute, and to a very rapid growth of the royal and elite classes in site centers. This issue is raised so clearly in the La Joyanca report that it will stimulate further discussion and research.
- 8 The concluding synthetic chapters by Arnauld, Breuil-Martínez, Lemonnier, and Ponciano raise many other provocative questions regarding ancient life at La Joyanca and implications for other regions. In each case, the emphasis is on local and sub-regional patterns and processes. Perhaps the work errs only in the direction of being too wedded to small-site methodology and too locally focused. In the concluding chapter, Arnauld

et.al, acknowledge this position and the fact that patterns of development at La Joyanca may reflect events at the great capital center of El Peru/Waka to the north of the site. I believe that the history of La Joyanca probably also closely reflects the changing fortunes of Maya centers according to their roles in the great three-century pan-lowland wars between the center of Tikal and its allies versus Calakmul and its allies.

- 9 Nonetheless, though perhaps a bit too radical, it is refreshing to see such a thorough study of a small center and its environs studied primarily in local terms. Hopefully this important work will guide Mayanists to look more carefully at such centers and to obsess less on the tombs, palaces, and temples of huge, but far less comprehensible, Classic period cities.

AUTHORS

ARTHUR A. DEMAREST

Vanderbilt University, Nashville