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Patron Gods and Patron Lords: The Semiotics of Classic Maya Community Cults. Joanne P. Baron. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2016, 208 pp. \$52.00, cloth. ISBN 978-1-60732-517-8

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Discussion of the identity of the mostly young males, 15 to 35 years of age (p. 73), whose skulls were placed in this offertory context pivots on Late Postclassic politics in this corner of the Maya region.

Although the Petén was a hub (some would say “the hub”) of the Classic Maya world, the southern lowlands receded into relative obscurity during Postclassic times, when the northern lowlands peaked demographically and politically. Nonetheless, the Itzaes—likely survivors of the Postclassic collapse of Chichén Itzá—established a kingdom on an island in Laguna Petén Itzá that withstood the onslaught of Spaniards until 1697. In collaboration with ethnohistorian Grant Jones, the authors have identified the brisk trade that moved through the “Ixlu isthmian transport hub” (p. 87) during the protracted Postclassic period and also the increasing hostilities between the Itzaes and Kowoj, who were expanding from the east. The authors propose a very late Kowoj conquest of Ixlu, which formerly had been under Itzá control. With this understanding, the rededication of sanctuary structure 2023 would have included offerings of the crania of slain Itzá warriors (p. 85). In this manner, Postclassic–Contact era archaeology in the Maya region provides a window into the politically destabilized world of the southern Petén, where political autonomy from Spanish colonial demands met its final death spiral.

Packed with archaeological detail, this book is an essential read for any scholar of the Postclassic–Colonial Mesoamerican world. Furthermore, this slender monograph is produced in a bilingual format with Spanish text on the verso and English text on the recto side. All figures and tables feature bilingual text, and the modest price of this monograph further reduces barriers to its accessibility to scholars in Latin America.

PATRICIA A. McANANY, *University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill*

Patron Gods and Patron Lords: The Semiotics of Classic Maya Community Cults. Joanne P. Baron. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2016, 208 pp. \$52.00, cloth. ISBN 978-1-60732-517-8.

Joanne Baron’s *Patron Gods and Patron Lords* introduces readers to the intersection of deity formation, power, and local politics through a cross-field analysis of Classic Maya culture (AD 250–800). At the center of this work are patron deities: gods emphasized, embodied, and venerated by political elites and the general populace for the stability and fortune of communities. Baron regards the creation and promotion of such deities as an alternative hegemonic strategy that moves beyond ancestor-based legitimacy and hereditary lines. Using a semiotic perspective, she moves past traditional typologies of Maya political organization and instead examines how semiotic chains of meaning concerning patron deity veneration rippled throughout time and space.

The theoretical orientation utilizes the relatively recent application of semiotic analysis to archaeology. Baron synthesizes Saussurean semiology (signifier-signified relationships) and Peircean semiotics (triadic models of signs and interpretation) to move beyond structuralist and poststructuralist approaches. She convinces the reader that, because signs have observable social consequences, pragmatism can help archaeologists understand sign systems in the present. The most interesting discussion is the interplay between semiotics and social institutions: semiotic chains have a relationship with time, as reactions to ritual events become new signs perpetuated and interpreted for generations. Discourse involving religious institutions (often manipulated by elites) can be made to appear “timeless” despite the propensity for dynamic change. This becomes especially relevant as we learn that patron deities tended to associate with geographical places and to accumulate in pantheons at Classic Maya centers.

An illuminating chapter addresses the semantics or purely referential meanings of supernatural entities in Classic Maya culture. Baron focuses on the debate concerning whether Maya gods were understood as specific entities or were manifestations of a larger, omnipresent divine force. She provides salient evidence for the former, drawing on linguistic data that the Mayan glyph for “deity” also carries strong connections with being ritually fed. Importantly, patron supernaturals are distinguished from generic deities by how their birth is described and by a unique introductory glyph that precedes lists of patrons. Veneration of patron deities likely occurred in temples that lack a specific funerary function and are architecturally variable in terms of form and size. Baron suggests that archaeologists must rely on discarded portable artifacts such as effigies, censers, and ritual paraphernalia to identify such temples in the absence of inscriptions.

The pragmatics of how patron deities were used in community and intercommunity politics is a central strength of this book. The data are rich and complex, as the reader learns that patron deities had strong indexical relationships to rulers and, by extension, social processes of alliance building, militarism, legitimacy, and identity formation. Baron proposes that hieroglyphic texts describing gatherings of patron deities may reference political alliances. For example, a political alliance between El Peru and Calakmul is indexically depicted as a gathering of patrons. Equally interesting is the role of patron gods in conflict, seen in depictions of deity capture or killing. Hieroglyphic texts recording an attack by Dos Pilas and Aguateca on Ceibal mention that “the painted back of *K'awiil* was chopped” and likely reference the destruction of the patron god effigy following Ceibal’s submission.

Using multiple lines of archaeological data, Baron presents an intriguing case study from her own excavations at La Corona, Guatemala. Her interpretations suggest that two royal lineages employed different political strategies to create legitimacy. The descendants of the founding lineage (*Tahn K'inich*) used strategies of ancestor veneration to perpetuate political authority. However, when the rival Six Nothing lineage came to power, their inscriptions touted a mythical founding ancestor thousands of years earlier to subvert the hereditary power of their predecessors. A host of new patron de-

ities was introduced over time by the Six Nothing lineage, resulting in the construction of patron god temples atop competing hereditary monuments of the previous lineage. Such gods were venerated throughout time even after the political downfall of the Six Nothing lineage. The integration of archaeological data with epigraphic information is well-grounded and demonstrates the intricacies of political activity.

Rather than approaching Classic Maya society as monolithic, one of Baron's key contributions is the characterization of local variation in political strategies and ritual practice. At times the text strays slightly from some of the triadic divisions of Peirce in favor of focusing on indexes, making it unclear exactly how icons and symbols contribute to semiotic chains. Nevertheless, it is refreshing to read research that uses a modern semiotic synthesis as archaeologists interested in iconography and epigraphy frequently adopt outdated or simplified forms of structural analysis. Overall, this enlightening work will appeal to most anthropologists as its four-field orientation exemplifies an anthropological perspective of the past.

NATHAN J. MEISSNER, *University of Southern Mississippi*

Making Value, Making Meaning: Techné in the Pre-Columbian World.

Cathy Lynne Costin, ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016, 496 pp. \$75.00, cloth. ISBN 9780884024156.

This tightly focused volume (stemming from a 2013 Dumbarton Oaks Symposium) offers a mature and nuanced approach to understanding the materiality of ancient objects that makes it a bellwether of the current state of technology studies. Costin's introduction lays out the volume's unifying focus, on *techné*, taking pains to explain the intersecting dimensions of that ancient Greek concept and its usefulness to the anthropological study of ancient material culture, pre-Columbian or otherwise. *Techné* is not really new to archaeology: some of us were employing it in the early 1990s. But this volume makes it the centerpiece of every one of the 13 fascinating case studies and, in so doing, ably demonstrates its analytical and interpretive value. The Introduction also does a terrific job of drawing out themes that cross-cut individual chapters, which helps demonstrate the value of *techné* for researchers (like me) who are interested in times, places, cultures, and productive practices other than pre-Columbian.

Costin argues that *techné* provides a robust anthropological concept for understanding how the intertwined physical, organizational, social, political, and ideological aspects of material production helped create the values and meanings of ancient things. At its core, *techné* is concerned with the emics of what I like to call "meaning in the making," though several chapters also explore how meanings and values were created during consumption and use. Costin elaborates six key tenets of *techné*, all of which