

## Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xv</i>
Chapter 1	
Paradoxical Politics: Negotiating the Contradictions of Political Authority	
<i>Sarah Kurnick</i>	<i>3</i>
Chapter 2	
Theories of Power and Legitimacy in Archaeological Contexts: The Emergent Regime of Power at the Formative Maya Community of Ceibal, Guatemala	
<i>Takeshi Inomata</i>	<i>37</i>
Chapter 3	
Negotiating Political Authority and Community in Terminal Formative Coastal Oaxaca	
<i>Arthur A. Joyce, Sarah B. Barber, Jeffrey Brzezinski, Carlo J. Lucido, and Víctor Salazar Chávez</i>	<i>61</i>
Chapter 4	
Conflicting Political Strategies in Late Formative to Early Classic Central Jalisco	
<i>Christopher S. Beekman</i>	<i>97</i>

Chapter 5	
Patron Deities and Politics among the Classic Maya	
<i>Joanne Baron</i>	121
Chapter 6	
Entangled Political Strategies: Rulership, Bureaucracy, and Intermediate Elites at Teotihuacan	
<i>Tatsuya Murakami</i>	153
Chapter 7	
Landscapes, Lordships, and Sovereignty in Mesoamerica	
<i>Bryce Davenport and Charles Golden</i>	181
Chapter 8	
Ruling “Purépecha Chichimeca” in a Tarascan World	
<i>Helen Perlstein Pollard</i>	217
Chapter 9	
Reflections on the Archaeopolitical: Pursuing the Universal within a Unity of Opposites	
<i>Simon Martin</i>	241
<i>List of Contributors</i>	279
<i>Index</i>	283

This volume examines the operation of political authority in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica. It considers, in other words, the creation, reproduction, and negation of politically authoritative relationships in several of the world's early complex societies. How did rulers acquire and maintain, or fail to maintain, political authority? And why did subjects choose to acknowledge or reject that authority? A primary goal of this volume is to advance the negotiation of contradictions as a fruitful avenue to explore the exercise of political authority in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica and in other parts of the world both past and present. In brief, rulers reinforce social inequality and bolster their own unique position at the top of the sociopolitical hierarchy yet simultaneously emphasize social similarities and the commonalities shared by all. Rulers also emphasize their differences from, and their similarities to, not only their followers, but also rulers of other contemporary communities and past leaders of their own communities. Followers, in turn, may choose to participate in politically authoritative relationships because of the appeal of an individual who is at the same time different and familiar, exceptional and relatable. They may recognize, in other words, the authority of an individual who is utterly distinct yet at the same time like them, like other contemporary rulers, and like past leaders.

In this introductory chapter, I will define political strategies and pre-Columbian Mesoamerica and

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*Paradoxical Politics**Negotiating the Contradictions  
of Political Authority*

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consider why their intersection is an important and useful locus of study. I will then review previously proposed explanations and advance an analytical framework for understanding how rulers rule and why followers often choose to follow—generally, and in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica specifically. Through this introduction and the case studies that follow, this volume aims to bring the negotiation of contradictions to the fore of studies of political authority.

## **POLITICAL STRATEGIES AND PRE-COLUMBIAN MESOAMERICA**

The following chapters examine the formation, perpetuation, and negation of politically authoritative relationships—relationships that are prominent and persistent features of past, other, and our own lives. Each chapter considers, in different ways, two fundamental questions: What strategies do rulers use to acquire and maintain political authority? And for what reasons do subjects choose to recognize or to reject the authority of rulers? These questions are, and have been, a primary concern of political philosophers from Aristotle to Hobbes, to contemporary scholars such as Giorgio Agamben (1998; Smith 2011a). For these and other thinkers, the “central problem of political life is to define—and reshape—the logic of authorization and subjection that assembles the polity and differentiates the terrain of personal will from that of sovereign power” (Smith 2011a:358). Put differently, the questions of how rulers rule and why followers often choose to obey lie at the core of politics and political association (Smith 2011a, 2011b).

Importantly, individuals do not always choose to recognize the authority of a self-styled leader or to obey her or his commands. Indeed, attempts to acquire and maintain political authority are not always successful and, even when successful, the authority acquired is not necessarily long-lived. Nevertheless, in various places and at various times, rulers did exercise political authority and individuals did choose to obey, and it is important to understand how and why.

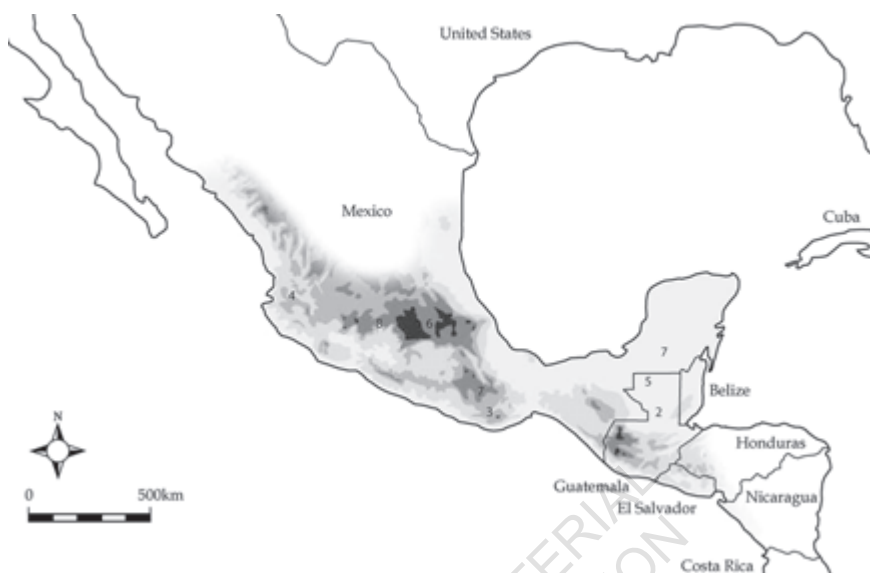
There exists, however, no single or simple answers to these questions. Rulers use a wide variety of strategies to induce their followers to obey, and followers have many different reasons for choosing to acknowledge authority. These strategies and reasons vary across time and space, according to local conditions and circumstances, and with a polity’s size, degree of political influence, and position in regional sociopolitical hierarchies. One goal of this introductory chapter is to advance a model that is all-inclusive yet allows for the great inherent variability in human practices. A goal of each case study is to ascertain and delineate the specific acts and practical actions—in other words, the

political strategies—that engendered and reproduced politically authoritative relationships among a particular group in a particular place during a particular time. This volume thus aims to advance a framework that will be useful to those studying political authority in any and all societies and also to understand how actual, specific social groups created and maintained—or rejected—political relationships.

Why study political authority through archaeology, and why take pre-Columbian Mesoamerican societies as examples? The exercise of political authority is an intensely physical process that operates through the built environment and through tangible objects—the subjects of archaeological inquiry (Meskell 2005; Smith 2003; Davenport and Golden, this volume). Because of their reliance on material culture, archaeologists can thus provide a “vision of politics . . . steadfastly centered on the intense physicality of power and governance” (Smith 2003:21). Indeed, the material mediation of sovereignty is currently a hotly debated topic within the discipline (see Smith 2011a, 2011b, 2012; Johansen and Bauer 2011).

Many different types of scholars, however, study objects and are able to emphasize the intensely physical nature of authority. Perhaps the more important and unique contribution archaeologists make to the study of the political is our ability to provide temporal depth and geographic breadth to modern practices. As Adam T. Smith (2003:22) writes, the “temporal distance that separates early complex polities from the modern can . . . be understood as providing a unique lens for viewing political life that lends our gaze a greater critical refinement.” Pierre Bourdieu (1994) similarly argues that studies of the origins, or genesis, of social institutions provide a means by which to understand and question those institutions. For Bourdieu (4) this “reconstruction of genesis” brings “back into view the conflicts and confrontations of the early beginnings and therefore all the discarded possibilities, [and] retrieves the possibility that things could have been (and still could be) otherwise.” Put differently, an understanding of political authority in the past enhances an understanding of, and stimulates reflection on, political authority in the present.

Why then study political authority in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica? Mesoamerica can usefully be understood as a heuristic concept scholars use to study diverse groups of people who lived in a particular area, spoke a particular set of languages, and shared a common set of beliefs and practices (R. Joyce 2004). Although its boundaries remain inexact, Mesoamerica is generally recognized as encompassing the land occupied by the modern nations of Belize and Guatemala, and parts of Mexico, Honduras, and El Salvador (figure 1.1). Ancient Mesoamerican peoples are thought to have



**FIGURE 1.1.** *Map of Mesoamerica showing locations of case studies from this volume by chapter number: (2) Ceibal, Guatemala; (3) coastal Oaxaca; (4) central Jalisco; (5) La Corona, Guatemala; (6) Teotihuacan; (7) Maya area and Mixteca Alta; (8) central Michoacán.*

spoken languages belonging to one of several families, including Mixe-Zoque, Totonac, Mayan, and Oto-Manguean. And Mesoamerican peoples developed similar, though not identical, subsistence practices, economic systems, and religious beliefs. Common characteristics include the cultivation of maize, the development of complex calendar systems, and participation in a form of the ballgame (Adams 2006; Blanton et al. 1993; Carmack, Gasco, and Gossen 1996; Evans 2004; R. Joyce 2004; Kirchhoff 1952; Spinden 1917; Weaver 1993).

Importantly, Mesoamerica was one of a handful of regions in the world where individuals independently developed agriculture as a means of subsistence and established sedentary villages and socially complex, hierarchical societies. Pre-Columbian Mesoamerican societies—those in existence from the initial occupation of the region to the arrival of Europeans—thus provide a prime example of the development of social complexity among early agricultural societies and of the operation of institutionalized political authority among early complex polities (Blanton et al. 1993; Evans 2004; Masson and Smith 2000; Sanders and Price 1968).

## POLITICAL AUTHORITY

I adopt a Weberian perspective on authority. Max Weber (1978:212) classically defined authority as the “probability that certain specific commands . . . will be obeyed by a given group of persons” and argued that authority necessarily implies a “minimum of voluntary compliance, that is, an interest . . . in obedience.” Authority, in other words, is the ability to give commands that others choose to obey. Weber’s definition has three principal components. First, it suggests a separation between those who give commands and those who opt to follow them, between those who exercise authority and those who do not. Second, Weber recognizes that authority is situational and that only certain people under certain circumstances will obey commands. As other theorists (Bourdieu 1991; Lincoln 1994) have noted, to be obeyed, commands must be given by the correct speaker, with the correct delivery and staging, in the correct places, at the correct times, and before the correct audiences. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Weber’s definition suggests that authority cannot exist without explicit recognition and voluntary compliance. Rather than passively accepting authority, powerful individuals, for whatever reasons, actively choose to comply.

This definition of authority is a naturalistic one, consistent with theories of human agency. Agency theories recognize that all individuals exercise power and that all individuals make choices that have meaningful consequences (for an overview of agency theory in archaeology, see Dobres and Robb 2000; Dornan 2002). Humans do not merely react; they act, making decisions that influence their own lives and the lives of others. As Anthony Giddens (1984:14) writes, agents are “able to intervene in the world, or to refrain from such intervention . . . . An agent is able to deploy . . . a range of causal powers, including that of influencing those deployed by others.” By adopting a Weberian definition of authority, I acknowledge the importance of the agency of all to the exercise of authority by a few. I also continue an archaeological trend of “agency-centered examinations that increasingly seek to situate elements of deliberate action within a multivocalic and polythetic prehistoric past” (Lohse 2007:2).

Takeshi Inomata (this volume, 2006a) raises important questions about the applicability of modern political theory—such as a Weberian understanding of authority—to archaeological contexts. He notes that much political theory was developed to explain modern, and often Western, contexts and argues that archaeologists need to participate in reflexive theoretical discourses with social theory rather than passively borrow and apply it. Other authors have similarly noted the tendency of archaeologists to project their own biases, prejudices,

and pre-conceived notions onto the past. As Julian Thomas (2004) argues, modernity tends to create a past in its own image.

Can a Weberian concept of authority illuminate political relationships in ancient societies? Specifically, does authority, as Weber asserts, necessarily imply legitimacy? And is authority still deemed legitimate when followers express discontent, discretely disapprove, or subtly resist (see Scott 1990)? As Inomata (this volume) asks, is the modern construct of legitimate authority applicable to archaeological contexts?

Smith (2003:108) defines legitimacy as “the ability of a regime to synchronize practices that perpetuate the existing political order within a discursive framework that generates the allegiance of subjects.” Stated simply, legitimacy is the ability of rulers to maintain their position in a way that engenders the support of their followers. Following Smith and others, I argue that authoritative relationships, past or present, necessarily imply legitimacy. As Smith (2003:109) writes, a “regime without legitimacy, based solely on domination, may be described as piratical or extortionist, but not authoritative.” Or, as Antonio Gramsci (1999:384) writes, “recourse to arms and coercion . . . can be nothing more than a methodological hypothesis . . . Force can be employed against enemies, but not against . . . one’s own side . . . whose ‘good will’ and enthusiasm one needs.”

I maintain that such a view does not negate legitimacy in the presence of dissent, disapproval, or subtle resistance. As many scholars have noted, dissatisfaction is likely to be present in all unequal social relationships. Indeed, “expressions of resistance of political domination are a component of all complex societies characterized by institutionalized power differentials” (Joyce and Weller 2007:144). Legitimacy is therefore best understood not as a condition that is either present or absent but as an ongoing process. Not all followers will agree with every act or decision a ruler makes, and those who do agree on some occasions will not agree on others. Rather, rulers must continually work toward legitimacy—through the use of political strategies—and followers continually choose to accept, subtly resist, or revolt against authority. At times of increasing dissatisfaction and dissent, regimes may either radically alter themselves or become illegitimate and fail. Arthur A. Joyce and colleagues (this volume), in their examination of the Terminal Formative Period lower Río Verde Valley, provide one example of a regime’s inability to maintain legitimate authority.

Several other questions arise from a Weberian definition of authority. How do rulers induce their followers to obey? What techniques and tactics do rulers use to promote their legitimacy and encourage their subjects to participate



in politically authoritative relationships? In *The German Ideology*, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1970:64) assert that the “ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas” and that the “class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force.” Put differently, those controlling the means of production also control the ideas that prevail in society. By propagating ideas that reinforce their own position at the top of the sociopolitical hierarchy, those in charge can prevent others from seeing clearly the conditions of their existence and thus from revolting to change those conditions.

Several scholars have adopted a Marxist understanding of ideology to explain how ruling classes maintain their social positions and prevent revolt. Antonio Gramsci (1999), for one, offers the notion of cultural hegemony, or ideological control that represents an existing social order as natural and to the benefit of all rather than arbitrary and to the benefit of a few. Louis Althusser (1971), to take another example, distinguishes two coexisting types of state apparatuses: repressive and ideological. Repressive state apparatuses, such as the army and the police, function primarily through physical violence and exploitation and secondarily through the creation and propagation of imaginary and distorted representations of the world. Ideological state apparatuses, such as schools and churches, function primarily by producing and reproducing such representations and secondarily through coercive force. But for Althusser, it is ideology that allows rulers to generate obedient subjects: for him, rulers create followers by propagating an inaccurate understanding of social relations.

Much like Althusser, Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1990) argues for dual processes of subjectification and frames rulers’ strategies in terms of two coexisting types of violence: overt and symbolic. The creation of subjects through overt violence involves physical tactics, such as the use of force, or economic tactics, such as usury or excessive taxation. Acts of symbolic violence also serve to create subjects but in a way that is perceived as more humane and that occurs when overt violence must be concealed and the real basis of authoritative relationships masked. Symbolic violence is thus a way of establishing and preserving unequal relationships in a more socially acceptable manner.

Michel Foucault (1979, 2003, 2007) has suggested a number of ways that rulers create and reproduce subjects, including torture and punishment, discipline, and biopower. Foucault distinguishes premodern corporeal control, based on torture and punishment, from modern corporeal control, based on discipline and biopower. To torture or punish, rulers create a public spectacle during which they exact revenge on the body of an individual who has committed a crime and consequently challenged authority. Such spectacles allow

rulers to restore their authority over disobedient individuals and demonstrate to others the consequences of refusing to comply. Torture and punishment function less to bring a perpetrator to justice and more to exhibit political authority in its most extreme form, to hurt or kill those who have disobeyed orders, and to dissuade others from similar acts of disobedience.

Discipline, on the other hand, is a positive, or constructive, political strategy whereby rulers create docile bodies—bodies that can be “subjected, used, transformed and improved” (Foucault 1979:136). Unlike punishment, discipline relies not on retribution for crimes but on the constitution and judgment of individuals. Discipline targets not actions but people, and it relies not on spectacle but on surveillance, observation, and subtle control over bodies. Biopower is exercised at the level of the population and transforms many unique individuals into a single, easily controlled, homogenous mass. Biopower is the “power of regularization,” a de-individualizing “technology in which bodies are replaced by general biological processes (Foucault 2003:247, 249).

Archaeologists disagree whether these two modern “technologies of the body” can and should be applied to non-modern societies. Inomata (2006a:188–89; see also Davenport and Golden, this volume), for example, argues that in ancient societies, disciplinary mechanisms like those described by Foucault “did not exist and were not fully developed.” Scott R. Hutson (2002:59), to take another example, uses Foucault’s notion of discipline but sparingly, as it brings “a distinctively modern conception of subjectivity that may not be appropriate for pre-modern societies.” Following Ian Hodder (2006) and others, I suggest that punishment and discipline can be coeval, rather than necessarily sequential, strategies and that discipline can be a useful concept to understand premodern politically authoritative relationships. Discipline does not necessarily require modern institutions such as the judiciary and psychiatric hospitals. As Hodder (2006:83) writes, “family, clan, and lineage can . . . be seen as mechanisms every bit as disciplining and pervasive as the structures of the modern state. Docile bodies were produced by the mechanisms of power working within the daily practices of social life.”

Much like Foucault, James C. Scott (1998) suggests that rulers create and reproduce subjects through regularizing processes. Rather than biopower, Scott focuses on the notion of legibility—the ability to “arrange the population in ways that simplified the classic state functions of taxation, conscription, and prevention of rebellion” (Scott 1998:2). Scott thus argues that rulers imposed certain organizational structures on their followers in attempts to simplify, keep track of, and ultimately affect, their actions.

Perhaps the most common framework archaeologists use to understand how rulers create subjects is Michael Mann's (1986) IEMP model of organized power. Mann suggests four sources of social power—ideological, economic, military, and political—and outlines the sociospatial organization of each. According to Mann (23), ideological power is a monopoly over that which is beyond the realm of the everyday, over that which “cannot be totally tested by experience.” Economic power is the monopolization over the production, distribution, exchange, and consumption of goods and resources. Military power is the monopolization over the legitimate use of force and political power is the monopolization over centralized, institutionalized, territorial regulation of social relations. For Mann, it is through these different forms of monopolization that rulers manifest their authority and prevail on followers to obey. Perhaps because of its utility, the IEMP model has become a common classification scheme for understanding the ways rulers induce their followers to obey. Waging wars against enemies—or threatening to do so—is often categorized as a primarily military strategy. Control over natural resources and trade routes is often categorized as a primarily economic strategy. And the performance of rituals, commissioning of monuments, and veneration of ancestors are often categorized as primarily ideological strategies.

But another question arises from a Weberian definition of authority. Why do individuals often choose to comply with authority? Why do they choose to participate in politically authoritative relationships? And under what circumstances do they refuse to comply? As mentioned, a Weberian perspective requires consideration of the actions of the ruler as well as those who choose to follow or to reject rulership. As many scholars (e.g., Hutson 2002; Joyce, Bustamante, and Levine 2001; Pauketat 2000) have noted, “political relationships are produced through social negotiations involving commoners as well as elites” (Joyce, Bustamante, and Levine 2001:343).

Answers as to why individuals chose to—or not to—comply can be divided into three general categories: those that emphasize negative or repressive reasons, those that emphasize positive or constructive reasons, and those that posit either uncritical habituation or a lack of other conceivable options. Scholars who suggest negative or repressive reasons maintain that individuals choose to obey authority because there will be adverse consequences if they do not. Refusal to comply with authority may result, for example, in a fine, social ostracism, or a more extreme penalty such as torture or punishment, as discussed above.

Those who suggest positive or constructive reasons argue that individuals choose to acknowledge authority because they believe in the validity and

virtue of that authority or because they have grown, or have been conditioned, to accept it. Weber (1978), for one, emphasizes the notion of belief, be it based on charismatic grounds, or the exceptional character of an individual leader; traditional grounds, or long-standing customs; or rational grounds, or the legality of enacted rules and laws. Bourdieu and Scott also adopt constructive theories but suggest that subordination can be self-legitimizing and that belief can result from learned patterns of behavior. Bourdieu (1977:93–94) discusses such patterns in his consideration of bodily hexis—a “political mythology realized, embodied, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking, and thereby of feeling and thinking.” Scott similarly argues that the performance of repetitive actions can engender belief. As he writes, “those obliged by domination to act a mask will eventually find that their faces have grown to fit that mask. The practice of subordination in this case produces, in time, its own legitimacy” (Scott 1990:10).

Finally, several theorists argue that individuals choose to comply with authority because of either uncritical habituation or a lack of other conceivable options. Bourdieu’s (1977:166; 1991) notion of *doxa*, or “that which is taken for granted,” provides perhaps the best example of this approach. As Bourdieu (1977:164) writes, “schemes of thought and perception can produce the objectivity that they do produce only by producing misrecognition of the limits of the cognition that they make possible, thereby founding immediate adherence, in the doxic mode, to the world of tradition experienced as a ‘natural world.’” Put simply, individuals take for granted the social conditions of their existence and do not realize that other possible alternatives exist. For Bourdieu (1977:168), this “recognition of legitimacy through misrecognition of arbitrariness” is the basis of all authority. Individuals conceive of particular authoritative relationships as the only options and believe those relationships to be normal and natural rather than debatable and arbitrary.

It must be emphasized, however, that individuals do not always choose to recognize the authority of a potential leader or obey commands. Attempts to acquire and maintain political authority are not always successful and, even when successful, acquired authority rarely endures. Notably, individuals who choose to reject authority and disobey orders often do so by appropriating the same mechanisms rulers use to foster legitimacy. As scholars recognize, political authority is “inherently problematic, as it is contingent on multiple factors that can be used against central authority as well as being used by it” (Earle 1997:10). David I. Kertzer (1988) has shown that particular symbols, and the rituals that employ them, serve to both bolster and question authority. As he writes, such “symbolism is necessary to prop up the governing political

order, but it is also essential in overthrowing it” (Kertzer 1988:174). Similarly, Foucault has suggested that spectacles of terror and punishment afford opportunities not only for a ruler to demonstrate her or his authority but also for the community to question and reject that authority. A group “drawn to the spectacle intended to terrorize it, could express its rejection of the punitive power and sometimes revolt” (Foucault 1979:59).

## **POLITICAL AUTHORITY IN PRE-COLUMBIAN MESOAMERICA**

Inquiries into Pre-Columbian Mesoamerican politics have frequently focused on political organization. The literature is replete with debates about how and to what degree pre-Columbian Mesoamerican polities were centralized and how best to model these polities—as strong states, weak states, city states, segmentary states, theater states, etc. (e.g., Chase and Chase 1996; Fox et al. 1996; Iannone 2002; Marcus 1993; Sharer and Golden 2004; Sharer and Traxler 2006). Political organization and integration, however, are only two aspects of politics. Also important are the strategies used to create, perpetuate, and resist authoritative relationships.

Over the last two decades, many scholars have offered explanations of how various pre-Columbian Mesoamerican societies created, maintained, and negated political authority. Perhaps the most prominent framework is Richard E. Blanton and colleagues’ (1996) overarching model of dual-processual theory. Other, more specific explanations are wide ranging but can usefully be divided into those that emphasize supernatural mediation and those that focus on the relationships between rulers and followers.

## **DUAL-PROCESSUAL THEORY**

In 1996 Blanton and colleagues proposed the notion of dual-processual theory to understand the operation of political authority throughout pre-Columbian Mesoamerica. In an effort to move away from neoevolutionary approaches, and specifically ideal-type stages, Blanton and colleagues identify two primary types of power strategies: exclusionary and corporate. Following Mann (1986), they define exclusionary strategies as attempts to monopolize control over various sources of social power and corporate strategies as those employed when, for whatever reasons, such attempts at monopolization are precluded. Although these two strategies coexist to some degree, according to Blanton and colleagues, one will always be paramount at any given place and time.

Dual-processual theory makes an important contribution by affirming the importance of communal political strategies rather than focusing solely on the monopolization of sources of social power (Blanton 1998; Feinman 2001). Dual-processual theory also creates an artificial and unnecessary dichotomy and forces those who rely on it to choose one of two possible dominant types of power strategies. The imposition of dichotomies, however, is not a useful way to understand complex social processes. Smith (2011b:419; see also Martin, this volume) offers a similar critique, writing that the primary influence of dual-processual theory has been to “reignite typological debates by substituting new terms rather than to open an inquiry into the practices of authorization and subjection at the heart of the political.” Furthermore, and as others have noted (Murakami, this volume:151; Drennan, Peterson, and Fox 2012), political interactions are complex, nuanced, and multifaceted and must be understood along multiple axes of variability, not “subsumed in a single dimension of leadership strategies.”

## SUPERNATURAL MEDIATION

Despite the prominence of dual-processual theory, perhaps the greatest number of scholars have argued that pre-Columbian Mesoamerican rulers derived their authority from their exclusive knowledge about, and thus ability to monopolize control over, esoterica, be it supernatural entities, time, or the cosmos in general. The most prevalent view in the literature is that pre-Columbian Mesoamerican rulers acquired and maintained political authority through their unique ability to communicate with the supernatural and act as intermediaries between their followers and deities—a view sometimes, though not always, couched in terms of shamanism.

Beginning in the 1960s, Peter T. Furst (1968, 1981, 1995) published a series of articles interpreting various Mesoamerican artifacts as evidence of shamanism (see Eliade 1972). Mining ethnographic accounts, Furst (1968:160) noted that members of certain South American societies believed in “shaman-jaguar equivalence and transformation.” Furst then used ethnographic analogy to argue that Olmec figures displaying a combination of human and jaguar characteristics depicted shamans transforming into their jaguar animal familiars. Drawing on the arguments presented by Furst, Michael Coe (1972) suggested it unlikely that a hierarchical society such as the Olmec would have produced an entire corpus of art that depicted shamans. For Coe, it was much more likely that these figures depicted not shamans themselves, but rulers who had appropriated shamanic attributes, including the ability to transform into jaguars.

In the ensuing decades, many scholars embraced the notion of “shamanistic paths to power” (Reilly 1989:17) within various Mesoamerican societies, including not only the Olmec (Reilly 1989, 1991, 1994, 1995; but also see Clark 1997) but also the people of Izapa (Guernsey 2006; Guernsey Kappelman 1997, 2001; Guernsey and Love 2005), the Zapotec (A. Joyce 2004; Masson and Orr 1998), the Mixtec (Joyce and Winter 1996), and the Maya (Freidel 2008; Freidel and Schele 1988; Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993; Oakley 2006; Schele and Freidel 1990).

Not all scholars who argue that ancient Maya rulers derived their authority from their exclusive control over esoterica suggest that rulers monopolized communication with deities. Some contend instead that rulers monopolized control over time. In 1996 David Stuart hypothesized an ancient Maya “belief that rulers were themselves embodiments of time and its passage—a role that was fundamental to the cosmological underpinnings of divine kingship” (Stuart 1996:165–66). In the past decade, Prudence M. Rice (2004, 2007, 2008) has championed this idea, arguing that Maya rulers derived their authority from their exclusive knowledge about, and thus illusion of control over, calendric knowledge. As she states, “the foundation of Maya kings’ power and divinity was esoteric knowledge about time” (Rice 2008:275). According to Rice, this esoteric knowledge would have afforded rulers the unique ability to make scheduling decisions, such as determining the most auspicious day for farmers to plant or harvest crops. And, for Rice (2008:279), “those who hold authority over the calendar of daily and seasonal economic and ritual activities also hold authority over individuals’ daily lives.”

Arguments asserting that rulers acquired and maintained authority through the monopolization of esoterica are problematic in several respects. First, despite the epigraphic evidence of the various ways in which pre-Columbian Mesoamerican rulers linked themselves with the divine (Houston and Stuart 1996), there is little to suggest—as Christopher S. Beekman (this volume) notes—that those rulers were either shamans or shamanic (Klein et al. 2002; McAnany 2001; Sanders 1995; Stuart 2005; Webster 1995, 2002; Zender 2004). Marc Zender (2004:77), for example, has refuted the archaeological, epigraphic, and iconographic evidence in support of ancient Maya shamanic rulership and concludes that “there is little contemporary support for . . . arguments in favor of the ‘shaman king’ concept.” Stuart (2005:263) has similarly asserted a lack of epigraphic evidence for the concept, writing that a “shamanic model of Maya kingship . . . is difficult to discern through the Classic texts.”

More broadly, it often remains unclear—and unquestioned—to what degree followers believed rulers’ claims of association with divinity. Importantly, an



assertion of supernatural mediation may be an ineffective strategy “if the messages that actors get . . . are quite different from the authoritarian propaganda intended by their senders” (Hutson 2002:65). One crucial aspect of Stephen D. Houston and David Stuart’s work is their consideration not only of how rulers presented themselves but also of how the rest of the population would have perceived them. As Houston and Stuart (1996:308; see also 2001) write,

We have described a system of legitimation predicated on dynastic assertions of divinity and monopolistic attempts to control divine mediation. These efforts may have met with variable success . . . Power derives from social and political discourse involving assertion, on the one hand, and acceptance or rejection on the other . . . The system of beliefs about Maya kings studied here is only one part of that equation. Whether it was widely held, whether it was believed firmly by the larger population, is another.

Monuments reflect not how things are but how their creators would like them to be. Indeed, monuments do not necessarily reflect accepted ideas but may be attempts to communicate and impose contested ones, and rulers often try hardest to communicate the ideas their subjects are least likely to accept (Bell 2007). Archaeologists thus cannot assume that subjects were receptive to rulers’ assertions. Rather, we must ask whether, and demonstrate that, rulers’ claims were accepted—as Joanne Baron (this volume) does in her consideration of the introduction of patron deity shrines at the Classic Maya site of La Corona.

## THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN RULERS AND FOLLOWERS

Another approach taken by scholars is to examine the various relationships between rulers and followers. Scholars adopting this approach emphasize that rulers and ruled formed part of a single, cohesive community and contend that the specific ways in which rulers and followers constituted and interacted within that community was essential to the exercise of political authority.

Some maintain that rulers fostered legitimacy by appropriating practices familiar to their followers, such as household rituals (Lucero 2003; see also McNany and Plank 2001), and specifically ancestor veneration (McNany 1995, 1998). Patricia A. McNany (1995), for example, cogently argues that the practice of ancestor veneration emerged in an agrarian milieu during the Middle and Late Preclassic Periods (1000 BCE to 100 CE) and was later appropriated by Classic Maya rulers to legitimize their authority. As McNany explains, the ancient Maya buried their dead in locations regularly inhabited



by living members of their community. By doing so, the living could—through the dead—legitimize their claims to land and other resources. By the beginning of the Classic Period, however, the practice of using ancestors to substantiate proprietary claims to land was “appropriated . . . politicized, and used as means to sanction elite power and authority” (McAnany 1995:127). According to McAnany (1995:125), rulers thereby subverted “ancestor veneration from a practice that linked family and lineage to landholdings to one that validated the semidivinity of the royal lines . . . and in general sanctioned kingly prerogative”<sup>1</sup>—a process Baron (this volume) illustrates at La Corona. Classic Period rulers could thus reinforce their own authority by referencing the authority of their progenitors—through recording their dynastic genealogies in hieroglyphic texts and iconography and by maintaining their family shrines.

Others suggest the importance of activities that created communal identities and fostered a communal sense of belonging. Robert J. Sharer and Charles W. Golden (2004:32), for example, in a discussion of moral authority, emphasize the importance of a community’s shared vision of socially correct behavior, and specifically the “shared view among both rulers and the ruled in the sanctions that gave rulers the rights to exercise authority over their subjects.” Warren D. Hill and John E. Clark (2001) similarly focus on the importance of shared, communal identities to the exercise of political authority and look to competitive sports as a catalyst for creating and contesting communal identities. They argue that team sports, such as the ballgame, would have engendered a heightened sense of community identity, a polarization of community loyalties, and the emergence of community leaders. And Inomata (2006b, 2006a) stresses the importance not of competitive sports specifically, but of theatrical events more generally—any and all public spectacles that include an audience acting as observers and evaluators (Inomata 2006b:806; Inomata and Coben 2006:15). For Inomata (2006a:189), Classic Period Maya “mass spectacles constituted a key mechanism for the cohesion of polities and for the imposition and subversion of power.”

One of the most important aspects of Inomata’s argument is the pivotal role he assigns to the audience that watched and evaluated theatrical events. Scholars studying the emergence of institutionalized politically authoritative relationships have often focused on aggrandizers—self-interested political entrepreneurs vying for prestige (Clark and Blake 1994:17; Hayden 2011; but also see Blanton and Fargher 2008). For those who adopt models centered on the actions of aggrandizers, “leadership is a creation—a creation of followership” (Sahlins 1963:290). Inomata (2006b:809) questions this approach

and argues instead that the “archaeological study of the development of large centralized polities should direct its attention not only to the political maneuvering of a small number of ‘aggrandizers’ but to the motivation and roles of an audience or the masses.” Inomata also raises the possibility that the gathering of an audience may prefigure and produce authority figures. In this sense, his argument recalls that of Bruce Lincoln (1994), discussed below, who suggests that large audiences may fall quiet not to listen to the voice of another but to hear themselves through a speaker they take as one of their own. As Inomata (2006b:808) writes, “public events may have created a condition in which the emergence of central figures in the form of dramatic protagonists was tolerated or even desired and demanded by an audience.” He thus suggests not that ambitious individuals became rulers by acquiring followers but that large groups of individuals may have preceded and allowed for the existence of rulers.

Still others argue that ancient Maya rulers tied themselves to their followers not by creating communal identities or fostering a communal sense of belonging but by making themselves essential to the daily lives of all (Freidel and Reilly 2009; Masson and Freidel 2013). Specifically, these scholars suggest that rulers proved themselves vital to a community by administering regional markets and ensuring supplies of food, water, and other goods. Lisa J. Lucero (2006a; 2006b), to take one example, emphasizes the politicization of environmental needs, specifically water. She notes the difficulties presented by the extreme seasonal variation in rainfall and the importance of available water in the dry season. Consequently, she suggests the possibility that “a ruler’s ability to provide clean water during the dry season served as a key means for the political elite to acquire and maintain political power at some centers” (Lucero 2006a:127).

## THE NEGOTIATION OF CONTRADICTIONS

The notion of contradictions has a long history in anthropological and archaeological thought, particularly in the form of the dialectic. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (2004) originally posited the notion of the dialectic and argued that change occurs through contradictions. A proposition, or thesis, contains within itself, and leads to the expression of, its opposite, or antithesis. The struggle between the thesis and the antithesis leads to a new proposition, or synthesis (Moberg 2013:71). As Hegel (2004:647) wrote, “we are dealing with forms of consciousness each of which in realizing itself at the same time abolishes and transcends itself, [and] has for its result its own negation—and so passes into a higher form.”

Marx adopted from Hegel the notion that history progresses through dialectical change, and that every historical epoch contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction. Whereas Hegel argued that dialectical change is driven by ideas, Marx stood Hegel on his head, arguing instead that change is driven by the forces and relations, or mode, of production. Furthermore, for Marx, the antithesis, or contradictory source of change, is class struggle. The capitalist epoch of history, for example, contains within it and gives rise to the proletariat, which will overturn the system and usher in a communist epoch (Marx and Engels 1970, 1967; Moberg 2013).

Practice theorists have also made use of the concept of the dialectic to describe the relationship between structure and agency. Bourdieu (1977:84), for one, argues for a dialectical relationship between structuring principles and the habitus. As outlined by Bourdieu, change to the structure and the habitus occurs because each influences and alters the other. By producing, and being produced by, the habitus, the structure contains within itself that which changes it. Similarly, by producing, and being produced by, the structure, the habitus also contains within itself that which changes it. Structuration theorists too use the notion of the dialectic, and of contradictions more generally, to explain social change. Giddens (1984), for example, like Bourdieu, posits a reflexive relationship between social rules and the actions of human agents.

Like social theorists more generally, archaeologists have emphasized contradictions as integral aspects of social relationships. Marxist archaeologists in particular have asserted the importance of the dialectic and of contradictions to an understanding of human societies, and particularly social change (McGuire 1993, 2002; McGuire and Saitta 1996; McGuire and Wurst 2002; Trigger 1993; Tilley 1984; Marquardt 1992; Spriggs 1984). Randall H. McGuire and Dean J. Saitta (1996), to take one example, argue that the contradictions between egalitarianism and hierarchy were a critical impetus for change in pre-Hispanic social organization in the southwestern United States. Christopher Tilley (1984), to take a second example, argues that contradictions between represented and actual social relationships fueled the change from the Funnel Neck Beaker tradition to the Battle-Axe/Corded-Ware tradition in southern Sweden.

Drawing on the theoretical and archaeological literature summarized in this chapter, I argue that the operation of political authority can usefully be understood in terms of the negotiation of contradictions. Although “conflict and contradictions are [often] viewed as major sources of social change” (Trigger 1993:176), I contend such paradoxes and incongruities can also be sources of stability. They can aid in the ongoing process of legitimation and “bind

individuals and social groups with conflicting interests together” (McGuire, O’Donovan, and Wurst 2005:366).

Specifically, I maintain that the operation of political authority involves the negotiation of a series of contradictions. Generally speaking, rulers must simultaneously reinforce social inequality and promote social solidarity and social similarities. Anthropologists have long questioned the nature and function of centralized political authority, and they debate whether such authority is primarily coercive and maintains the privilege of the few or whether it is primarily integrative and coordinates and regulates societies for the benefit of all (Claessen and Skalník 1978; Cohen 1978; Engels 1970; Fried 1967, 1978; Gailey and Patterson 1987; Haas 1982; Jones and Krautz 1981; Service 1975, 1978; Yoffee 2005). Several scholars (e.g., Cohen 1978; Haas 1982) have suggested that authority need not have one true purpose and that it can simultaneously be coercive and integrative. I argue that it is not just that societies with centralized political authority are often both coercive and integrative. Rather, those exercising authority must adopt strategies that are at the same time coercive and integrative, that at once strengthen social differences and bolster social solidarity and similarities. Rulers, in other words, must adopt strategies that reinforce their own exclusive position at the top of the sociopolitical hierarchy and at the same time promote social cohesiveness and recognize the similarity of all. And individuals may recognize authority, at least in part, because they accept social inequality but still believe in social similarities and a communal identity.

More specifically, I maintain that rulers must emphasize the ways in which they are unique and distinct from all others yet at the same time demonstrate their commonalities with their subjects, rulers of other polities, and past rulers of their own polities. Followers, in turn—though their specific motivations must necessarily remain unknown to us—may choose to recognize authority because of the appeal of individuals who are unlike all others yet who simultaneously tie themselves to their community and to other leaders both present and past (Kurnick 2013).

By definition, political authority involves a separation between those who give commands and those who choose to obey them. To communicate and demonstrate their authority successfully, rulers must create and perpetuate dissimilarities between themselves and their followers. Perhaps for this reason, scholars studying the acquisition and maintenance of authority have tended to focus on the establishment and institutionalization of difference: there is a long tradition of understanding difference as the essence of authority. That trend is particularly evident in studies of kingship (Feeley-Harnik 1985; Helms 1998;

Hocart 1927; Quigley 2005; Sahlins 1981, 1985, 2008). Such an emphasis on difference is also an important component of Mann's IEMP model of social power, which frames authority in terms of the monopolization over various sources of social power and thus in terms of exclusivity and uniqueness: those who hold monopolies are necessarily distinct from all others.

Difference is unquestionably an integral component of rulership. Authority would cease to exist if rulers did not actively work to distinguish themselves. But the processes associated with acquiring, legitimizing, and exercising political authority are more complex, nuanced, and multifaceted. It is not enough for rulers merely to set themselves apart. They must also emphasize their sameness. Houston and Tom Cummins (2004:384–85) make just this point in their consideration of Mesoamerican and Andean royal bodies, arguing that “the regal frame had to be made into a paradox” that “undertakes at once common yet unique acts.” The regal body wears clothing, has five senses, and exists as a material, earthly entity, yet simultaneously is unlike and distinct from all other bodies. Inomata and Houston (2001:13; see also Inomata 2001) also note the “inherently contradictory nature of kingship: at once remote and close: sacred and secular, protective and dangerous.” And Houston and Stuart (2001: 61) suggest that authority be understood in terms of such paradoxes, noting the existence of a “ruler who forms a collectivity with his people and yet is existentially distinct.”

Emphasizing difference is thus not enough. On the one hand, rulers must emphasize their similarities to other members of their community. To demonstrate successfully their legitimacy and to engender the allegiance of subjects, rulers make manifest the ways in which they and their subjects are alike. Put differently, one method by which rulers garner the support of others is to be, in some respects, like them. And one reason subjects might choose to acknowledge authority is the appeal of an individual who is exceptional yet nevertheless relatable. Indeed, an increasing number of scholars have emphasized the importance of subjects in the constitution and reconstitution of authoritative relationships (Joyce, Bustamante, and Levine 2001; Inomata 2006b; Lucero 2003), and some assert a reflexive relationship in which rulers and followers influence one another, albeit to substantially different degrees (Lohse 2007). Put differently, “not only do commoners react to elite strategies, but elites react to commoner strategies as well” (Yaeger and Robin 2004:149).

To take one example, Jason Yaeger (2003) argues that, at Xunantunich, Belize, a “Xunantunich identity” shared by rulers and followers alike was crucial to the exercise of authority. As he writes,

This identity was overtly and implicitly fostered and reinforced in political and religious celebrations at Xunantunich, but its creation was not a top-down process. Politically charged practices in hinterland settlements helped define the criteria of membership in this community and the rights and responsibilities of its members, and the community's existence was implicitly accepted and reinforced through daily practices throughout the Xunantunich hinterland. (Yaeger 2003:135-36)

Commonalities between rulers and subjects thus facilitate the operation of political authority.

In a discussion of authoritative speech, Lincoln makes a similar point. He asks,

When an authorized speaker advances to an authorized and authorizing place, the audience falls quiet . . . How does this silence come to be? . . . What does the absence of speech signify? More pointedly, one might ask if it is the speaker . . . who silences an audience, or if an audience silences itself in order that the speaker might speak? Further, is it really the speaker who speaks to the audience in such situations, or does an audience speak to itself through the medium of the speaker? . . . We are led to wonder if, at least in those situations where the audience is most respectfully attentive, it might not be silencing itself in order to hear itself speak to itself through a speaker it takes to be its own representative, delegate, or incarnation? (Lincoln 1994:9-10)

Individuals may thus acknowledge authority because they are recognizing someone who is distinct, but also because they are recognizing someone who is like them.

On the other hand, rulers must also emphasize their similarities to, and differences from, their counterparts in other communities as well as their predecessors in their own communities. Many scholars have stressed the importance of foreign ties to the operation of political authority. In a consideration of leadership in Melanesia and Polynesia, Marshall David Sahlins (1963:290), for one, notes the importance not only of community relations but of foreign affiliations, writing that leaders must not only interact with their supporters but must also "fac[e] outward from [her or] his own faction." In a discussion of ancient Mesoamerica specifically, John E. Clark and Michael Blake (1994:19) similarly emphasize the importance of both intra- and inter-communal relations and argue that aspiring or successful leaders must "traffic outside their home communities and establish ties to individuals elsewhere."

Other scholars have stressed the importance of the past to the operation of authority. In a discussion of Classic Maya temple architecture, Karl Taube (1998:469) considers one function of temple facades "to portray what

is enduring and constant in Maya kingship and religion, linking the generations of the living to the honored dead.” And, as already discussed, many (e.g., Freidel and Schele 1988), particularly McAnany (1995, 1998), have documented the importance of ancestor veneration to Mesoamerican rulership.

Like these and other scholars, I maintain that politically authoritative relationships involve not just rulers and followers but other contemporary rulers and lines of past rulers. Importantly, political communities do not exist in isolation, either geographically or temporally. Rather, they are part of broader cultures and have their own lengthy histories. To be successful, rulers must show that they are part of the already-established customs and traditions of rulership yet maintain that they are nevertheless exceptional. They must demonstrate their likeness to rulers of other polities and to past leaders of their own polity yet still communicate their uniqueness. The force of already-established customs and traditions of rulership suggests another reason why individuals might have chosen to comply with authority: individuals may be more likely to accept established ideas rather than completely novel ones. Numerous scholars (e.g., Connerton 1989; Hobsbawm 1983; Pocock 1971; but see also Appadurai 1981) have emphasized this force of tradition. As Lucero (2003:525, 544) puts it, “abrupt or extreme change is much less likely to succeed because new ideas, beliefs, and practices are foreign and unacceptable,” but “adopting and expanding familiar, traditional rites allow[s] . . . rulers to connect to those with whom they [wish] to build and maintain an unequal relationship.”

In sum, in addition to understanding the exercise of political authority as the creation and maintenance of difference through the monopolization of sources of social power, scholars should also consider the exercise of political authority as attempts by rulers to emphasize their differences from, and similarities to, their subjects, rulers of other polities, and past leaders of their own polities. In addition to classifying political strategies as attempts by rulers to monopolize ideological, economic, or military power, scholars should also consider the importance of community, of extra-local connections, and of the past to the operation of political authority.

## THE PURVIEW OF THE VOLUME

In the following chapters, contributors will present seven case studies that span the geographic breadth and temporal depth of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica. These case studies will consider societies ranging from Formative Period groups in coastal Oaxaca to the Classic Period Maya in the Petén



region of Guatemala, to the Postclassic Period Tarascans in Michoacán, Mexico. The case studies will also use a variety of different data types, incorporating information from excavations, surveys, architectural configurations, and ethnohistoric documents, among other sources. Each case study, however, will grapple with the same two fundamental issues: how those exercising authority compel others to obey and why individuals choose to recognize, or to reject, such authority. And each case study will use the proposed framework along with newly gathered data to ascertain and understand the specific strategies and practical actions that engendered and reproduced, and sometimes negated, politically authoritative relationships in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica.

In chapter 2, using the Formative Period Maya community of Ceibal as a case study, Takeshi Inomata questions the applicability of concepts such as authority and legitimacy to premodern contexts. He rightly suggests that authority and legitimacy are not monolithic, coherent concepts and that scholars can and should consider various types of authority and various types of legitimacy, especially within the premodern world. He also cogently argues for a shift in scholarly emphasis from the actions of individual rulers to the interactions between the many different social groups that constitute communities.

In chapter 3, Arthur A. Joyce and colleagues examine the negotiations among the diverse social groups within the Formative Period lower Río Verde Valley in Oaxaca and consider how that polity emerged as well as how and why its existence was both tenuous and transient. Much like Inomata, Joyce and colleagues argue that authority is not singular and that an understanding of the dynamic and ever-changing relationships between various social groups is critical to an understanding of political authority.

In chapter 4, Christopher S. Beekman reassesses traditional arguments that Late Formative and Early Classic Period rulers in the Tequila valleys of central Jalisco were shaman kings who ruled through their ability to monopolize sacred power. He focuses instead on the co-occurrence of social institutions that contributed to the aggrandizement of individual lineages and those that addressed the needs of the entire community.

Joanne Baron, in chapter 5, examines the importance of religious ritual, and specifically practices of patron deity veneration, to the negotiation of politically authoritative relationships among the Classic Period Maya. She uses the community of La Corona as a case study to address how followers received claims of divine sanction and supernatural mediation made by rulers.

In chapter 6, Tatsuya Murakami focuses on the Classic Period city of Teotihuacan. He emphasizes the physical, tangible nature of political authority



and communal identity and considers how similarities and differences in architecture reflect the complex and changing nature of relationships between Teotihuacan's rulers, bureaucracy, and intermediate elites.

In chapter 7, Bryce Davenport and Charles Golden, much like Murakami, emphasize the material nature of authority and examine the relationships between authority and territory. Through an exploration of the Mixteca Alta and Maya regions, they consider the connections between Mesoamerican rulership and landscape and argue that, although the bodies of rulers and commoners were fundamentally different, the actions those bodies performed to delimit the landscape were essentially similar.

Helen Perlstein Pollard, in chapter 8, argues for the importance of a new ideology to the creation of the Tarascan state in Michoacán during the Middle Postclassic Period. Central to this new ideology was a founding cultural hero, Tariacuri, who was simultaneously a member of the local Purépecha and the foreign Chichimec ethnic populations. Notably, Tarascan rulers expressed their similarities to, and differences from, those they ruled by, like Tariacuri, claiming both Chichimec and Purépecha ancestry.

In chapter 9, Simon Martin concludes the volume by placing into historical and theoretical context the key themes raised within the various chapters and considering potential future avenues for research.

Together, this introductory chapter, the case studies, and the concluding chapter aim to place the negotiation of contradictions at the fore of studies of political authority and promote an all-inclusive model that allows for variability in human practices across time and space. In doing so, the volume emphasizes not only the importance of difference but also of similarities. It eschews the notion of shaman kingship and suggests an alternative to the classic categorization of political strategies as ideological, economic, or military. Taken as a whole, the volume offers a theoretically based inquiry into political life in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica. It seeks to address fundamental questions and to speak to both the past and the present political moment.

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## NOTE

1. This statement does not mean, however, that farmers no longer venerated their ancestors. Rather, practices of ancestor veneration continued throughout the Classic Period at the family, lineage, and house level.

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