The following review appeared in the May 2008 issue of CHOICE:


The Maya Classic period (250-900 CE) site of Palenque (especially the Temple of the Inscriptions) is the focus of this 19th volume in the "Mesoamerican Worlds" series. Aldana (Chicana-Chicano studies, Univ. of California, Santa Barbara) has written a complex, carefully argued, and convincing reassessment of Maya archaeoastronomy, cosmology, and writing based on his history of science dissertation. This new analysis reveals the historically contextualized human agency of Maya kings and provides a more sophisticated description of the functions of Maya astronomers. Aldana reasons that the calendric 819-day count was a component of a secret ritual language designed to restrict political power to the nobility. The count, he argues, was an astronumerological tool that Maya scribes used to simplify complex calculations. The volume has four prefatory essays (Orthography, Rulers' Names and Cities, Calendrics, and Hieroglyphic Script), an introduction, seven chapters, and an epilogue augmented by an essential 67-item glossary, 41 figures, 154 endnotes, 215 references, and 8-page index. The author considers in depth the monarch Janaab' Pakal, coded numerological messages, dynastic history, architectural programs, political instability, artistic themes, and secret knowledge used to maintain political legitimacy. Indispensable for Maya scholars. Summing Up: Essential. Graduate students/faculty/professionals. -- C. C. Kolb, National Endowment for the Humanities