IMS Recommended Reading

Recently released book:

Classic Maya Polities of the Southern Lowlands: Integration, Interaction, Dissolution
Edited by Damien B. Marken and James L. Fitzsimmons

For nearly a century, discussions of Classic Maya political organization have been dominated by various forms of the same debate: to what degree were Maya polities centralized or decentralized? The collected authors examine the premises, strengths, and weaknesses of these two perspectives while strongly advocating a move beyond this largely sterile debate. The relatively recent proliferation of archaeological investigation into the functional makeup of preindustrial states and complex polities has increasingly demonstrated the highly dynamic and variable nature of these ancient political and social units.

Classic Maya Polities of the Southern Lowlands investigates Maya political and social structure in the southern lowlands, assessing, comparing, and interpreting the wide variation in Classic period Maya polity and city composition, development, and integration. With new, largely unpublished data from several recent archaeological projects, this book examines these two perspectives before moving beyond the standstill into different territory.

The volume examines the articulations of the various social and spatial components of Maya polity—the relationships, strategies, and practices that bound households, communities, institutions, and dynasties into enduring (or short-lived) political entities. By emphasizing the internal negotiation of polity, the contributions provide an important foundation for a more holistic understanding of how political organization functioned in the Classic period.

ISBN: 978-1-60732-412-6. 272 pages; 54 illustrations; Published by the University Press of Colorado.

"A valuable contribution to the Mesoamerican literature and to the study of ancient political processes in general."
– Edward Schortman, J. Kenneth Smail
Professor of Anthropology, Kenyon College

Despite the advance in our understanding of Classic Maya political interaction gained by the decipherment of the hieroglyphic record, scholars remain largely unsuccessful in describing and modeling what a Classic Maya polity actually looked like on the ground. This volume is the outgrowth of a roundtable held in the fall of 2009 at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C. Both the roundtable and the volume bring together a group of younger scholars actively engaged in investigating the topic.

The ten chapters are varied, yet revealing. Timothy Mutha presents "Negotiated Landscapes: Comparative Regional Spatial organization of Tikal and Caracol". Here he provides an approach to evaluate polity, territory, and site organization starting from a household perspective, or as he puts it “from the bottom up.”

Damien B. Marken penned a chapter titled “Conceptualizing the Spatial Dimensions of Classic Maya States: Polity and Urbanism at El Peru-Waka, Peten.” Within the pages supplemented by numerous tables and figures, Marken proposes a “multi-scalar interaction” approach to analyzing Classic Maya polities.

Allan L. Maca explores “Tomb 68-1, Copan: Deducing Polity Dynamics During the Early Classic Period and Beyond”. This tomb, within Structure 11K-28, is located in the El Bosque archaeological zone, in the southwestern corner of the Copan National Archaeological Park.

One of my favorite chapters is chapter 7, by Francisco Estrada-Belli...
and Alexandre Tokovinine, titled “La Sufricaya: A Place in Classic Maya Politics.” See the glyphs from Mural 9 on page 1.

The authors note “With hieroglyphic writing deciphered, students of the ancient Maya civilization are privileged with access to the Precolumbian landscape through the words of the creators and inhabitants. Places and histories, people and events that shaped the Classic Maya world are now known and can be contrasted to the material remains of the distant past discovered by archaeologists.

The 2005 excavations at La Sufricaya, Peten, Guatemala, unearthed two mural paintings that shed more light on the long-debated relationship between the Lowland Maya and the populous urban center of Teotihuacan in Central Mexico.

Another interesting chapter is: “Political Interaction: A View from the 2,000-Year History of the Farming Community of Chan” by authors Cynthia Robin, Andrew Wyatt, James Meirhoff, and Caleb Kestle. Chan is in the Belize River Valley.


**Damien B. Marken** is instructor in the Department of Anthropology at Bloomsburg University and editor of the book *Palenque: Recent Investigations at the Classic Maya Center.*

**James L. Fitzsimmons** is associate professor of anthropology at Middlebury College and author or editor of four books, including *Living with the Dead: Mortuary Ritual in Mesoamerica.*

**Upcoming Events at the IMS:**

All IMS events for June will take place in Room K-413 at Miami Dade College – Kendall Campus. That’s Building K-4, Room 13. See www.mdc.edu

June 8 • 8 pm: An Intro to the Maya Earthquakes and Volcanoes: Geological Contributions to the Development of the Maya Civilization – with IMS Director of Research **Joaquin J. Rodriguez III.**

June 15 • 8 pm: IMS Feature Presentation Climate and Environment of the Maya Lowlands, Then and Now – with **Mark Brenner, Ph.D.**, of the University of Florida.

**Future IMS Programming Note:**

In our Maya studies, we have learned that the Maya (ancient and modern) adapted well to change in order to survive and transcend. In that spirit, we will sync our monthly schedule with that of Miami Dade College, and we will suspend our public lectures for July and August. We shall resume in September!