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978-0-521-10195-0 - Maya Postclassic State Formation: Segmentary Lineage Migration in Advancing Frontiers

John W. Fox

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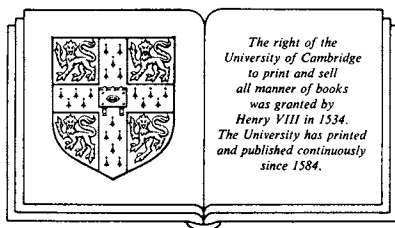
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JOHN W. FOX Associate Professor of Anthropology, Baylor University

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In memory of

J. ERIC S. THOMPSON

*who pointed the way to the Gulf frontier
and for his pathfinding integration
of ethnohistory and archaeology,
and in acknowledgement of*

ROBERT M. CARMACK

*for his pioneering application
of segmentary lineage theory to
Quiché sociopolitical reconstruction*

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FOREWORD

“Archaeology is anthropology or it is nothing” was an admonition first popularized in American archaeology by Willey and Phillips (1958: 2) and soon after adopted as a call to action by the “new archaeology” of the 1960s (Binford 1962; Longacre 1970). In recent years, a reaction has set in against the intellectual position represented by this slogan. Such reaction is reflected in calls for new, purely archaeological theories (see Gummerman and Phillips 1978, for example), the setting up of new independent departments of archaeology in North America, and attempts to draw closer links between archaeological and other non-anthropological fields.

As salutary as these trends might be for the discipline’s collective ego, the pendulum should not swing too far away from the recognition of archaeology’s useful reliance on anthropological thinking. Anthropology still serves as a potent source of concepts, models, and theoretical stimulus. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that in their interpretations of the archaeological record, archaeologists have to rely on analogies. Clearly, ethnography provides a crucial data base from which archaeologists draw their analogies. Historical writings also can be invaluable in this regard, particularly when the archaeologist is dealing with complex societies. Even in the study of historical sources, however, an anthropological perspective, or what is often termed an ethnohistorical approach, looms large.

Given the current debate about archaeology’s intellectual ties, John Fox’s important study of the Chontal-Quiché can be highly recommended for all serious students and professionals. Although Maya scholars will find the book to be essential reading for its eye-opening treatment of the critical Classic–Postclassic transition in Maya development, its careful – albeit controversial – consideration of the role of “foreign” influences in the development of ancient Maya civilization and its detailed discussion of the organization of the Quiché state deserve a much wider audience.

While specialists can and will argue about some of Dr Fox’s particular interpretations and conclusions, the field as a whole should find his use of anthropological theory to illuminate a specific archaeological problem to be a stimulating example of “archaeology as anthropology” and a spur to future research. Scholars interested in archaeological studies of migrations and frontier zones should also find Dr Fox’s study of relevance.

Additionally, archaeologists should carefully and critically examine Dr Fox’s methodology. After all, methodology is really what much of the debate over “archaeology as anthropology” or “archaeology as archaeology” is all about. Where do archaeologists find the analogies which are needed to link the archaeological record

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found in today's world with the past activities which helped produce it? How are such analogies then used to make these linkages? How are the linkages made reliable? What research strategies are needed to put these procedures into operation?

Archaeologists concerned with these types of questions, which should encompass most of the profession, will find this book has something to offer them. In sum, the book is not only a major contribution to Maya studies but to general archaeological method and theory. It fits perfectly with the aim of *New Studies in Archaeology* to make available clear examples of the changing intellectual character of the discipline, and we are pleased to include it in the series.

JEREMY A. SABLOFF

COLIN RENFREW

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Several persons should be singled out for recognition of their special contributions to this study. First, it was Robert M. Carmack who was the first to identify segmentary lineage organization among the Quiché, which is applied herein as a general model to a variety of kindred groups spaced throughout the Maya highlands and lowlands. However, it was my esteemed colleague, Kjell I. Enge, who initially introduced me to the segmentary lineage behavioral tendency of long distance migration. This construct, as well as others, was explored in long discussions.

I also wish to thank those who have lent their expertise in critiquing sections of this work, and for offering invaluable suggestions when it was still in manuscript form: Edward Calnek, Robert Carmack, Michael Coe, Munro Edmonson, Grant Jones, Stephen Kowalewski, Terry Majewski, Joyce Marcus and Prudence Rice.

Others contributed unpublished data. Lorenzo Ochoa graciously outlined a detailed itinerary for me of Epiclassic and Postclassic sites within the Mexican Chontalpa, thereby sharing an invaluable firsthand inspection of assemblages so remarkably similar to those left by the Quiché's migratory ancestors in Guatemala. So, too, Dwight T. Wallace provided his heretofore unpublished photographs of the antique fine-paste carved pottery from Utatlan, which now constitutes the long-sought-after Chontal-styled ceramics discussed time and time again in the archaeological literature. Alain Ichon generously granted permission to reproduce his maps of Cawinal and El Jocote. Of the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, Fred Stross, Frank Asaro and Helen V. Michel, liberally lent their time and expertise to analyze obsidian samples from Jacawitz and Ochal.

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