

This book examines the role of factional competition in the evolution of political systems in the ancient New World. It analyzes how competing factions within local groups and between regions sparked the emergence of social inequality, changing patterns of chiefly authority, the formation and expansion of states, and the rise of institutional specialization. The contributors isolate the sources of factional competition in the kinship and political structures of New World societies. They explore the opportunities and constraints presented by different mediums of competition such as feasting, gift-giving, and warfare, and analyze the relationship of factional competition to class struggle, ethnic identity, and resource shortages. They also define the evidence left by factional competition in the archaeological record. Recognizing the multiplicity of factions and interests that existed in prehistoric societies, the contributors suggest that theories of strict systemic or structural causality are inadequate for the analysis of social change. Instead, they offer studies that integrate agent-centered and system-centered views.

These new insights into premodern political systems, the dynamics of social change, and the evolution of social complexity in the New World will interest archaeologists, anthropologists, political scientists, and historians.

NEW DIRECTIONS IN ARCHAEOLOGY

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Factional competition and political development in the New World

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Preface

This volume began with a chance meeting between Liz Brumfiel and John Fox at the World Archaeological Congress, Southampton, in 1986. We recognized our mutual interest in the internal dynamics of political development and our complementary specialties in the prehispanic Aztec and Maya. We also recognized our mutual interest in visiting Amsterdam, the site of the 46th International Congress of Americanists in 1988.

The two of us organized the symposium “Factional Competition and Political Development in the New World” for the 46th International Congress of Americanists. Participants included the two co-editors of this volume, David Anderson, Bruce Byland, Pedro Carrasco, Mary Helms, Stephen Kowalewski, John Pohl, and Rudolf van Zantwijk. Encouraged by the quality of the symposium papers, we decided to edit a

volume devoted to exploring factional competition as a force of social transformation in prehispanic New World societies. To increase the breadth of coverage, we solicited additional papers from John Clark and Mike Blake, Terry D’Altroy, Fred Hicks, Mary Pohl, Helen Perlstein Pollard, Elsa Redmond and Chuck Spencer. To our regret, Pedro Carrasco had to drop out of the project; his contribution is sorely missed. Glenn Perusek, a specialist in historical materialist approaches to interest group politics and rational choice theory, generously offered to write an overview of the volume from his perspective in political science. We gratefully accepted his offer.

With the support of the editorial staff at the Cambridge University Press, we completed editing this volume in May 1992.