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978-1-108-92618-8 — Ancient Oaxaca

2nd Edition

Richard E. Blanton , Gary M. Feinman , Stephen A. Kowalewski , Linda M. Nicholas

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Ancient Oaxaca

Over two thousand years ago, Oaxaca, Mexico, was the site of one of the earliest episodes of primary state formation and urbanism in the Americas, and today it is one of the world's archaeologically best-studied regions. This volume, which thoroughly revises and updates the first edition, provides a highly readable yet comprehensive path to acquaint readers with one of the earliest and best-known examples of Native American state formation and its consequences as seen from the perspectives of urbanism, technology, demography, commerce, households, and religion and ritual. Written by prominent archaeological researchers who have devoted decades to Oaxacan research and to the development of suitable social theory, the book places ancient Oaxaca within the context of the history of ideas that have addressed the causes and consequences of social evolutionary change. It also critically evaluates the potential applicability of more recent thinking about state building grounded in collective action and related theories.

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UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge.

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www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108926188

DOI: 10.1017/9781108921954

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First published 1999

Second Edition 2022

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-108-83097-3 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-108-92618-8 Paperback

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Preface to the Second Edition

This book investigates one of pre-Hispanic Mexico's most significant episodes of sociocultural change. Around 500 BC, in the Valley of Oaxaca, a new regional capital was established at Monte Albán that endured for more than a millennium. Today this two-thousand-year-old settlement is one of Mexico's most famous and spectacular archaeological sites. Monte Albán's origins signaled the beginnings of one of the earliest Native American states and the emergence of new economic and cultural institutions that brought a surge in regional population growth and a broadly based increase in the quality of life. Over many field seasons, the four authors of this introductory text have produced much of the most important primary information we have about Monte Albán and the development of complex societies in Oaxaca. They draw on an abundance of excavated remains and regional archaeological settlement pattern surveys to provide a succinct account of the causes and consequences of political, economic, cultural, and demographic change in Oaxaca.

This second edition is almost a complete rewrite of the first edition, which was published in 1999. In many senses, it took two decades of further field studies, new conceptual perspectives, and renewed collaborations between the authors to craft a volume that comes closer to our shared vision of this transforming episode in Oaxaca's past. We are deeply grateful to our teachers, who introduced us to the marvels of Oaxaca and its rich past, to the field and laboratory crews, who assisted our investigations, and the local people and institutions, who gave us permissions and allowed us to walk over and investigate on their lands. Our experiences would have been less rich, our memories less fond, and our investigations less fruitful without the concerted help and support of all these mentors, students, colleagues, and friends.