



M. Kathryn Brown, Travis W. Stanton, eds. *Ancient Mesoamerican Warfare*. Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2003. xii + 370 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7591-0283-5.



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## Archaeologists Looking at Ancient Warfare

While archaeologists often acknowledge the role of warfare in the development of chiefdoms and early states, many ignore an in-depth study or discussion of warfare, preferring to look at trade/exchange or settlement patterns. As *Ancient Mesoamerican Warfare* demonstrates however, several Mesoamerican archaeologists are more than happy to grapple with the topic of warfare in chiefdoms and early states.

After a brief introduction by the editors, the first section of the book examines the material culture of prehistoric and early historic Mesoamerica and the evidence for warfare. While one might expect the three chapters in this section to look at fortifications or weapons, the main focus of two of the chapters is an artifact much more mundane and not usually associated with warfare?pottery. George Bey III's article (?The Role of Ceramics in the Study of Conflict?) illustrates two ways in which warfare can affect ceramic production. For the Late Classic site of YaxunÃ; in the YucatÃ;n, after its conquest by CobÃ;, chemical and petrographic analyses indicate that the locally made domestic and burial pottery was quickly replaced by pottery made in CobÃ;. This in-

dicates that the political elites did have an interest in domestic pottery production, and suggests that the elites at CobÃ; saw conquest and identity being linked to domestic ceramics. In his second case study, the chemical analyses indicates that endemic, internal warfare in the Petexbatun region of Guatemala during the Late Classic period destroyed trade networks and caused domestic pottery production to become more localized.

Arthur Joyce's article looks at the nature of contact between Monte AlbÃ;n and Teotihuacan in the Basin of Mexico with sites in the RÃo Verde valley of Oaxaca. While there are some general similarities in the pottery styles at times between the areas under study, Joyce notes this is not definite proof of conquest. Similar pottery styles could also be due to the spread of a common technology via some process of trade and exchange, or some other form of indirect, hegemonic control.

The second section of the book looks at the relationship between warfare and ritual. Pagliaro et al. look at reverential and desecratory termination rituals in Mayan contexts. With their stress on the context of the finds, their chapter is good for both archaeologists and histori-

ans attempting to recognize the type of destruction levels found at Mayan sites. A case study exemplifying many of their points is Brown and Garber's "Evidence of Conflict during the Middle Formative in the Maya Lowlands." Another examination of desecratory termination rituals is the article on warfare at YaxunÃ1 by Ambrosino et al.

While the three chapters may sound redundant, it needs to be stressed that the epigraphic evidence for warfare amongst the Maya is not as concrete, nor complete, as many would like. While epigraphic evidence points to warfare during the Late Classic period (Ambrosino et al., pp. 110-114), the epigraphic evidence for warfare is largely lacking for earlier periods of Mayan history. While the implication may be that warfare was a rare event before the Late Classic period, the presence of fortifications at Late Formative and Early Classic Mayan sites suggests otherwise. Being able to determine whether a termination deposit is ritual or desecratory in nature is another crucial piece of evidence in understanding the extent of warfare in Mayan society.

The iconography and epigraphy of warfare is the focus of the third section. "Text and Contexts in Maya Warfare" by Diane and Arlen Chase provides a useful review of the Maya glyphs used to denote warfare. While there is uncertainty in the exact meaning of some glyphs, their review clearly shows that the Mayan had a vocabulary that could express and denote conflicts of varying scale—ranging from the capture of individuals or settlements to the destruction of entire dynasties and polities.

The two case studies in this section, one by Kent Reilly III and James Garber, and another by Annabeth Headrick, may sound convincing due to their use of the ethnohistoric record, but it must be noted that there is a danger in extrapolating from ethnohistoric evidence back to earlier periods. As noted in a later chapter, ethnohistoric accounts "were constructed purposely to project specific ideas about the past, and it never should be forgotten that these projections were created strategically to accomplish certain agendas" (McCafferty, p. 243). In the case of the Olmec and their iconography, the Spanish conquest of Mesoamerica occurred over 1500 years after the decline of the Olmec civilization. Furthermore, the relationship between the Olmec culture and the successive Maya culture is not clear-cut. In the case of the article by Headrick, not only are the above criticisms relevant, but there is the issue of using ethnographic and

historical analogies. One can seriously question how relevant Muslim concepts of "jihad" are in understanding Aztec warfare (Headrick, pp. 160-162).

The fourth section contains two articles focused on the ethnohistoric record. While the above criticisms on using ethnohistory can apply here also, Geoffrey McCafferty takes a much more nuanced approach in "Ethnic Conflict in Postclassic Cholula, Mexico." Employing a dialectical methodology, he attempts to note the overlaps and ambiguities in the ethnohistoric and archaeological evidence. Constructing a more complete story of the past is not his goal per se (p. 222), but understanding the limitations and biases in the two types of evidence is.

The final section contains only two essays. The first by Stephen LeBlanc compares research on warfare in the American Southwest to Mesoamerican warfare studies. This article provides a detailed overview of warfare studies in the Southwest and makes a strong case for it being a serious affair and not a small-scale, ritual behavior. The essay ends by examining the similarities and differences between warfare in Mesoamerica and the Southwest. This is a useful chapter since it provides a comparison on warfare in a neighboring geographic area. The second essay by Payson Sheets is a summary of the papers in *Ancient Mesoamerican Warfare*. This particular essay is useful since it not only summarizes the articles in the volume, but also places them in context to previous generations of Mesoamerican scholarship.

There are two minor problems with this book. A chronological chart and maps showing the various culture zones of the groups mentioned in the text would have made it more accessible to scholars working elsewhere in the world. Moreover, the quality of the figures varies between articles. These oversights notwithstanding, *Ancient Mesoamerican Warfare* is an admirable study examining warfare in chiefdom and early state societies. While the geographic focus is on Mesoamerica, the theoretical and methodological scope of the papers should have wide appeal to scholars working in other geographic regions and time periods. The book also provides a glimpse into the different ways archaeologists are attempting to deal with warfare. A warning to scholars looking for a book describing Mesoamerican fortifications, weapons, strategy and tactics—this book is not for you.

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