



The Ancient Maya Marketplace: The Archaeology of Transient Space

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Trading was the favorite occupation of the Maya, according to early Spanish observers such as Fray Diego de Landa (1566). Yet scholars of the Maya have long dismissed trade—specifically, market exchange—as unimportant. They argue that the Maya subsisted primarily on agriculture, with long-distance trade playing a minor role in a largely non-commercialized economy.

The Ancient Maya Marketplace reviews the debate on Maya markets and offers compelling new evidence for the existence and identification of ancient marketplaces in the Maya Lowlands. Its authors rethink the prevailing views about Maya economic organization and offer new perspectives. They attribute the dearth of Maya market research to two factors: persistent assumptions that Maya society and its rainforest environment lacked complexity, and an absence of physical evidence for marketplaces—a problem that plagues market research around the world.

Many Mayanists now agree that no site was self-sufficient, and that from the earliest times robust local and regional exchange existed alongside long-distance trade. Contributors to this volume suggest that marketplaces, the physical spaces signifying the presence of a market economy, did not exist for purely economic reasons but served to exchange information and create social ties as well.

The Ancient Maya Marketplace offers concrete links between Maya archaeology, ethnohistory, and contemporary cultures. Its in-depth review of current research will help future investigators to recognize and document marketplaces as a long-standing Maya cultural practice. The volume also provides detailed comparative data for premodern societies elsewhere in the world.

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