

The Archaeology of Political Organization: Urbanism in Classic Period Veracruz, Mexico. BARBARA L. STARK. 2022. Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press, Los Angeles. xxiii + 384 pp., 246 figures, 19 tables. \$89.00 (hardcover), ISBN 9781950446148; \$72.00 (ebook), ISBN 9781950446193.

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Barbara L. Stark's book is a data-rich synthesis of more than 40 years of settlement survey work in the Western Lower Papaloapan basin (WLPB) of south-central Veracruz, Mexico. Guiding the interpretation of the voluminous data is the question of how urbanism developed in that part of the Gulf lowlands during the Classic period (about AD 300–900). The study of earlier Olmec developments immediately to the south of this region has often overshadowed analysis of thriving Classic period cultures in the WLPB and nearby, an oversight that Stark addresses.

Previously the WLPB was known chiefly for Classic period carved monuments from Cerro de las Mesas, including stelae with hieroglyphic writing. Although this monograph does not discuss these monuments at any length, it provides by far the most important archaeological data to date for understanding the sociopolitical context from which these monuments (and related art and architecture) emerged.

The book's 13 chapters may be divided into three groups: (1) those that present general settlement data and method (Chapters 1–4), (2) those that focus more on monumental complexes and their role in regional studies of urbanism (Chapters 5–11), and (3) synthetic chapters (Chapters 12 and especially 13).

The initial data-rich chapters firmly establish the parameters of low-density urbanism operative throughout the Classic period: dispersed settlements blanketed the region punctuated by monumental complexes that defined political centers. The evidence for an earlier Late Preclassic period suggests a smaller population, with the only real

concentration of people around what would become central Cerro de las Mesas.

The chapters on monumental complexes describe the region's centers and the remarkably consistent architectural plan—the Standard Plan Plaza Group (SPPG)—that structured the Classic period centers. The SPPG consisted of a plaza defined on one side by a conical mound and on another by a ballcourt. Elongated mounds defined at least one and sometimes both the remaining plaza sides. Similar consistent plaza organization may be found in many examples in the Cotaxtla/Jamapa drainage to the north and west of the WLPB, as shown by Annick Daneels. Elements of the SPPG may be found earlier in Late Preclassic Tres Zapotes to the south, but the plan as a whole was a new formulation at the beginning of the Classic period in the WLPB and was to remain fundamental there for the rest of the first millennium.

Cerro de las Mesas and Azuzules, both in the fertile Blanco River delta region of the WLPB, were the largest Classic period monumental centers. Stark suggests that these two centers were connected to form a regional capital zone throughout much of the Classic period. Cerro de las Mesas came to prominence first, in the Late Preclassic, but by the Late Classic period Azuzules had eclipsed the site. A host of secondary sites sprang up in the region in the interim. The packing of secondary centers in the delta region is particularly notable.

Stark's survey data show that the WLPB cultural tradition collapsed and the major centers were abandoned between 800 and 1000. This is also around the time of the disappearance of major elements of Classic elite culture throughout the Gulf Coast, such as the making and carving of fine stone yokes. The subsequent Postclassic period is not the focus of the volume but is treated in some detail, better defining the end of the Classic period tradition.

Low-density urbanism forms a key frame for the volume's analyses throughout and especially in the synthetic chapters. Unlike the Classic period in the altiplano, the WLPB did not boast large, nucleated cities but instead exhibited households spread across the

landscape, punctuated by a few primary centers with monumental architectural complexes.

In the synthetic statement on political organization (Chapter 13), Stark prefers to pursue a more general outline of governance, focusing on detecting strategies for achieving and maintaining power, rather than speculating on the specifics of political organization. Stark reads the repetition of the SPPGs in monumental complexes large and small across the WLPB as indicating mainly segmentary governance principles that privilege collective action and corporate principles over autocratic ones. Segmentary here refers to the tendency to replicate political functions at every level of organization. Stark is quick to point out that there is a continuum between corporate and autocratic principles that is continually being negotiated. In general, however, low-density urbanism with segmentary governance is here juxtaposed with the centralized authority of the “big states” of Classic highland Mesoamerica, especially Teotihuacán and Monte Albán. For Stark, this highland/lowland division may be seen across considerable parts of Mesoamerica. The large number of relatively independent polities across tropical lowland Mesoamerica, which here include both the Classic Gulf Coast and the Classic Maya Lowlands, is seen to privilege segmentary governance principles; however, Stark also argues that the peoples in the south-central Veracruz lowland regions were less interested than were the Classic Maya in the centrality of dynastic rule (a hallmark of the Maya but also seen in the stelae of Early Classic Cerro de las Mesas) and more interested in following a template for the design of all centers (the SPPG). Here it may have been helpful to more energetically differentiate between patterns seen in the Classic Maya Lowlands and those seen in the study area, taking into account recent hypotheses on fluctuating Classic Maya superstates and their relation to the highland capitals.

The book presents a moderately skeptical critique of settlement survey results in Mesoamerica generally. Stark is especially wary of polity boundary definitions that are too quickly accepted as definitive. She also takes aim at an earlier hypothesis that drove some Gulf settlement analyses: that redundant subsistence production made political centralization unlikely. To counter this traditional narrative for the WLPB, Stark points out the evidence for varied ecological areas, more economic differentiation, and larger capitals in the region than was previously recognized. All future studies of the Mexican Gulf Coast will greatly benefit from Stark’s careful rethinking of Classic period settlement in the WLPB region.

Unveiling Pachacamac: New Hypotheses for an Old Andean Sanctuary. Giancarlo Marcone, editor. 2022. University Press of Florida, Gainesville. ix + 239 pp. \$85.00 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0-8130-6933-3.

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In 1886, Max Uhle conducted excavations at Pachacamac, a powerful oracle center at the time when Pizarro and his allies conquered the Inca Empire. Uhle’s fieldwork uncovered a complicated occupation sequence stretching across hundreds of years that he struggled to understand. Many subsequent researchers have worked at Pachacamac and the surrounding Lurín Valley—the site is just outside the city of Lima—making it perhaps the most heavily researched location in the Andes. The pace of research has accelerated over the last two decades amid efforts to further develop Pachacamac as both a major tourist attraction and the location for a national museum.

The popular understanding of Pachacamac, however, remains tethered to ethnohistoric accounts and cross-cultural analogies. The now-classic interpretation of the site—one that I admit still colors my imagination—is of an enduring ritual center reminiscent of Delphi in Greece. Since time immemorial, the site is seen to have stood on a hill facing the Pacific, welcoming pilgrims from across the Andes. Travelers congregated for weeks in a sacred precinct, fasting and abstaining from sexual relations before they could pass through a wall into a second precinct containing pyramids with ramps that were shrines to the oracle built by different communities. Only a few, however, were allowed to pass through a final wall and climb to the ancient Temple of Pachacamac. Even they were not worthy of consulting the oracle face to face: priests disappeared into the darkest recesses of the building to consult with the wooden statue that embodied the god.

Empires loom large in the classic interpretation of Pachacamac. Wari in the seventh century co-opted the center to advance their hegemony, and then the Inca did the same about 900 years later. The Inca intervened greatly in the site, constructing a Temple of the Sun, an Acllahuasi (House of the Chosen Women), and other buildings. The essence of Pachacamac nonetheless endured through time in the classic interpretation until it was abandoned during the upheavals of the Spanish conquest. This view of the site has not only shaped our understanding of the long-term history of Peru’s Central Coast but has also informed our understanding of religion, pilgrimage, and power throughout the precolumbian Andes. For the 13 authors in *Unveiling Pachacamac*, the classic interpretation is fundamentally flawed in both fact and