

Bord öffnen durfte. Auf Seite 30 wird die von Peter Simon Pallas zitierte Instruktion für Carl Heinrich Merck, den Naturforscher der sogenannten Billings-Saryčëx-Expedition (1785–1795) auszugsweise zitiert. Die Formulierung, dass “Merck seine Notizen und Sammlungen Pallas, der für deren Auswertung und Veröffentlichung sorgen wollte” (30), überließ, ist zumindest missverständlich. Merck war aufgrund dieser Instruktion strikt gehalten, alle Sammlungen, schriftlichen Berichte, Aufzeichnungen und Manuskripte “an die von Ihrer Kayserlichen Majestät zu bestimmende Behörde abzuliefern”. Wobei hinzuzufügen ist, dass Pallas die dafür zuständige St. Petersburger Akademie der Wissenschaften verkörperte. Von daher darf man geradezu froh darüber sein, dass Pallas in den drei Bänden der “Zoographia Rosso-Asiatica” sowohl Merck als auch Georg Wilhelm Steller als seine wesentlichen Informanten so häufig im Text nennt und lobend erwähnt. Chamisso wies in seiner “Walschrift” direkt auf Merck als den Verfasser eines Textes hin, übernahm aber auch Pallas’ Charakterisierung, dass Merck ein “hochgelehrter Mann” gewesen sei.

Dittmar Dahlmann

Foias, Antonia E.: *Ancient Maya Political Dynamics*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013. 290 pp. ISBN 978-0-8130-4422-4. Price: \$ 79.95

Although the historical content in ancient Maya inscriptions was famously predicted as far back as in 1910 (by Charles P. Bowditch), it was taken seriously only in 1950s and 1960s by scholars like Tatiana Proskouriakoff and Heinrich Berlin, followed with the study of “collapse” theories, initiated by T. Patrick Culbert from the 1970s, and with more specific considerations of Maya state organization by archaeologists like R. E. W. Adams since 1981. The subsequent research and the decipherment of the Classic Maya inscriptions led to a resurgence in the interest in different aspects of ancient Maya political organization. Antonia E. Foias’ book presents a very welcome addition to this growing field of study. Furthermore, the style of her work, with taking into account general accounts of the state (including anthropology of politics and studies of power in general), and combining these considerations with the data from other parts of the world and comparable historical periods, makes this a book that is easy to read. The tables and illustrations serve to illuminate the author’s main points. Foias’ data are frequently drawn from Motul de San José (as the locality in the Petén in Guatemala is known today), where she recently directed a long-term project – a fascinating polity in the Southern Maya Lowlands, which apparently shifted its allegiance from Tikal to Calakmul, before being conquered by Dos Pilas.

The main text is subdivided into seven chapters. The “Introduction” presents some basic remarks about Mesoamerican chronology. The important point when discussing organization of ancient societies is that one should not take for granted some of the previous models, like the one of the “Asiatic mode of production,” the model which was first suggested by Marx, and in mid-20th century elabo-

rated by Wittfogel. Quite to the contrary, as the author notes: “Maya people lived well at the site [of Motul de San José – A. B.] during the Late Classic period” (4). Of course, there is a risk into running into another extreme – the idea that premodern states were all about peace and harmony. Foias shows that this is also quite unlikely: “The reality of the past is that systems were predominately neither hierarchical nor equal; the truth lies somewhere in between, depending on local circumstances and historical contingencies” (5). Second and third chapters present brief but informative outlines of the relationship between political anthropology, archaeology, and the study of ancient states. For example, R. E. W. Adams’ work in particular has drawn on possible analogies between medieval Yoruba city states and the Mesoamerican political organization, and in recent years, analogies have also been drawn with the states in ancient Southeast Asia. All of this puts the Classic Maya (as well as their neighbors) in a wider context of the development and adaptation of human cultures to their particular environmental and historical environment.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 present different levels of political analysis – from the macro-, through middle-, to micro-level. Foias first outlines the debates on whether Classic Maya polities were organized as “centralized,” or “decentralized” states. It seems that part of the problem is that our understanding and use of these terms stems from the understanding of contemporary world, and the extent to which our “modern” terminology could be extended back in the past remains open. After presenting several case studies, Foias seems to side with Joyce Marcus’ view that the most useful model for interpreting ancient Maya states is the “dynamic” one – not only did these states vary in shape and size, their alliances also changed over time, and were dependent on a number of factors. When discussing internal organization of these states, Foias introduces welcome comparisons with China (Qin dynasty), using as her starting point Max Weber’s classical study of bureaucracy. She concludes that there are three main characteristics of Classic Maya political structure: first, it “was political-ecclesiastical; nobles were promoted from lower to higher positions during their lifetimes. Second, it was hierarchical; there were from two to four levels of elite officials ... Third, it was intensely personal; superior elite patrons ‘owned’ the lower officials or priests, even after death” (160 f.). As political power also needed to be asserted in everyday life, this was done through numerous public rituals – which, of course, had their costs, which meant that political performances demanded “control over economic resources, but not necessarily control over all of economy” (192). In tracing the lines of political influences, Foias uses both, latest advances in the decipherment of Maya glyphs and new assessments of Mayan economic practices, primarily related to trade and tribute. Different objects were used as tools for exercising and displaying power – she cites examples of figurines, pots, and stone monuments. (Perhaps her discussion of the role of ideology would also have benefited from considerations of Raymond Aron.) Most importantly, the role of the so-called “commoners” should not be overlooked –

as they were an integral part of the political landscape, in which they played an active role.

In her “Conclusions,” Foias claims that the “aim of this work is to present how archaeologists have reconstructed ancient Maya politics during the Classic period” (220), but this book is much more than that. It is an exemplary model of good scholarship and clearly presented arguments, who should find their use far beyond specialized Mesoamericanist courses.

Aleksandar Bošković

Fortis, Paolo: *Kuna Art and Shamanism. An Ethnographic Approach.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012. 257 pp. ISBN 978-0-292-74353-3. Price: \$ 55.00

“Kuna Art and Shamanism,” an interesting and useful ethnographic experiment applying current models from Amazonian anthropology to a Central American culture, explores the connections between art and ontology among the Kuna of Panama in terms of the relationship between Kuna shamans and their auxiliary spirits, which are represented by carved wooden anthropomorphic figures (*nuchukana*). The author, Paolo Fortis, argues that categories he glosses as design and image are central to Kuna conceptualizations of the human person and to their perceptions of the world.

In the first two chapters of the book, dedicated to the author’s life among the Kuna, to the human spaces for economic and ritual activities, and to the forest beings that cause illness, Fortis characterizes Kuna perceptions of the forest as a dangerous space filled with spirit danger, but also as a source of curing.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the carving of the figures representing auxiliary spirits (*nuchukana*). Fortis shows that this activity is linked to the fertility of Kuna elders and to their ritual skill in dealing with ancestral tree entities. Through mastery of wood carving, a senior Kuna man can manipulate the powerful fertility of trees, transforming his own fertility and giving shape (life) to primordial entities. According to Fortis, a carver, conceptualized as a kind of male midwife, transforms part of a tree into a person, extracting a baby *nuchu* from its arboreal mother.

The next two chapters describe the life cycle of Kuna *neles* or seers, focusing on their relationships with both human kin and nonhuman beings. Fortis places much importance on *kurkin*, the somatic and spiritual attribute giving humans their destinies and spiritual powers, in the case of seers their ability to learn from cosmic entities and human beings. Thanks to his *kurkin* a *nele* has the ability to see into the invisible world, though this power must be maintained through medicines throughout his life.

Chapter 6 develops the idea that for the Kuna, shamanism is closely linked to what it means to be human. He presents the concept of *tarpakana*, entities associated in dreams with *nele*’s auxiliary spirits. Through *tarpakana* a seer can establish contact with the animals and acquire secret knowledge from them. Fortis develops this theme through the analysis of a myth about the killing of the mother of eight Kuna mythic heroes and the comparison with similar myths from Amazonia.

The final chapters consider the connection between carved figures and alterity, in part through comparison between Kuna and Xinguno myths and ritual praxis. Chapter 7 (“Images of Alterity”) focuses on the relationship between a *nele* and his *tarpakana*, on the initiation ceremony for a young *nele*, and on myths about alliances between humans and animals as a source of power against enemies. Fortis argues that in the Kuna case, these alliances ended with the transformation of animals into their current form and their separation from human beings. In chapter 8 it is argued that *nuchukana* are the instantiation of those primordial beings in present-day Kuna life. For him, wood carving is linked to the mythological attempt to bring the dead back to life. To understand what a *nuchu* for Kuna is, he considers the connection between “double of the dead” and “soul of the dead.” The meaning of carving a *nuchu* lies in its key role of mediating between human beings and primordial souls. The carvings represent the first people who lived on the earth, who were transformed into trees before today’s Kuna appeared. As such, they are the instantiation of primordial entities in the present-day Kuna lived world. They are generic images of a person and a body which is endowed with subjectivity. In this last chapter, Fortis further explores the definition of *kurkin* and the relevance of its design.

Throughout the book, Fortis foregrounds three visual categories (body, image, and design) that inform and organize the way the Kuna perceive their world. The differences between designs (in, for example, *mola* blouses) and images (such as *nuchukana*) consist of visibility vs. invisibility, and human learning vs. creation during mythic times. This opposition between image and design, according to Fortis, constitutes the elementary structure of the Kuna visual system, the basic opposition through which they organize visual experience. In this context, the body provides the synthesis through which image and design can coexist.

“Kuna Art and Shamanism” makes a worthy contribution to recent discussions in the Amazonian literature about the link between designs, personhood, and the body. How far Amazonian models can be pushed so far from home, however, is open to argument. In the Kuna case one difficulty concerns animal entities, which are conceptualized not as ordinary animals, but as the spirit masters or kings of animal species. Also problematic is the alleged separation between animals and humans. Fortis argues that ancient culture heroes transformed animals and sent them to a separate domain; it could be argued, however, that even today human social life also includes animals and that thus the separation is partial or illusory.

On some points of fact, Fortis differs with other sources on the Kuna. In chapter 5, for example, he asserts that, although women may become shamans in adulthood, only males are marked for shamanism from birth, a claim contradicted by Nordenskiöld (E. Nordenskiöld et al., *An Historical and Ethnological Survey of the Cuna Indians.* Göteborg 1938: 80–89), among others. Perhaps most important, the opposition between design (*narmakkalet*) and image (*sopalet*), fundamental to the book’s argument, can be understood differently in the Kuna language (*dulega-*