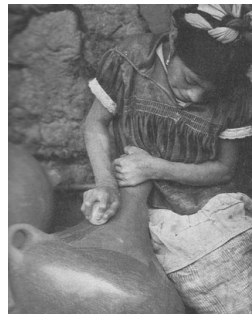

PATRICIA A. MCANANY. *Ancestral Maya economies in archaeological perspective*. xviii+374 pages, 58 illustrations. 2010. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 978-0-521-89518-7 hardback \$ 90 & £55.

It may bring a smile to know that the person originally approached by *Antiquity* to review



McAnany's book declined, partly because the individual was not Roman Catholic. That this should make a difference in the world of academe is a trifle unnerving. It stems from McAnany's mention early in the book that, having grown up Catholic and attended Catholic schools, she is

well aware of how religious beliefs and ritual practice can permeate any and all domains of culture, including economy. I have recently used my own Catholic upbringing as justification for the perspective I employ in re-examining Christianity at Conquest (Graham 2011). Does a strange form of standpoint

theory now in vogue make me better placed than an atheist or an Anglican to evaluate the book? I hope not, because such an implication completely misses McAnany's achievement. Reference to her Catholic background is an anecdote meant to show that real-life individuals experience an intertwining of the complex domains of life normally kept conceptually separate by archaeologists. We need to recognise — rather more rigorously than has heretofore been the case — what McAnany calls 'entanglement', which is that ritual, power, production (construction, crafting, cultivation and processing) and economic matters are all intimately connected in humans' everyday experience.

McAnany's publications demonstrate a long-standing interest in Maya economic practices, and this volume builds and expands on her earlier research. It begins with a discussion of how, in the case of ancient states, economy has often been studied by 'carving out' an economic sector in a manner inspired by the cultural logic of Western-style capitalism. She proceeds on the assumption that economies are fundamentally social entities, and grapples with hierarchy by moving away from the idea that the main socio-political dynamic in the past was one of dominators and dominated or of the powerful and powerless. Instead, drawing on practice and structuration theory, she builds a framework to support the argument that dialogue, negotiations and practices of all parts of society, and indeed of all people in society, are worth examining because they reveal all kinds of power.

In the second chapter, to help make the book broadly accessible, McAnany reviews in highly readable fashion what is known about the Maya past from about 12 000 BC to modern times, a considerable feat in itself. Chapters 3 to 9 focus on landscape, labour and socially constructed space, monumental architecture, authority and the royal court, identity and production, commerce, and tribute. She concludes (Chapter 10) by drawing attention to the irony that although her interest lies in economic practices, the word 'economy' appears infrequently in her preceding chapters. The same predicament features in my own recent book, except that I start with 'religion', rarely mention the word in the chapters that follow, and come to a similar conclusion: that the fault lies not in the world but in our analytical framework. To McAnany, 'our analytical frame has been overly shaped by pioneer theoreticians of capitalism such as Adam Smith and

Thorstein Veblen' (p. 306), but the problem may lie deeper, in the nature of academe itself — what it believes it can do and how it goes about doing it. Wittgenstein might say, 'no news to me'.

McAnany's book is path-breaking. I can see it replacing standard Maya textbooks with their chapters on 'economy', 'politics', 'environment' and 'religion'. Perhaps more important, it provides models with clear directives on how to follow integrative approaches to our thorniest research problems. In this respect it will be inestimably helpful to researchers as well as to graduate students. I take issue with some ideas: that the various Maya cultures through space and time thought in terms of 'debt payment' to the gods (see Köhler 2001); with the metaphor of 'feeding', particularly in associating it with 'human sacrifice'; with monumental architecture as a function of hierarchy and not a public project which the community appropriated as theirs. Most important, Mayanists would make a grave mistake in thinking that captive taking had to do with 'tribute ransom' (Chapter 9). I have long argued (e.g. Graham 2006, 2011) that the taking of captives should be seen as an economic matter related to tribute appropriation, and most assuredly *not* driven by 'sacrifice'. By extension, the appearance of captives in art and inscriptions, and the paintings on vases of tribute presentation in courts are statements about what is owed to whom. To use the term 'ransom' would take us down another road of (Western) error from which it would take years to retreat. Tribute appropriation among Maya *and* Aztecs is embodied in captive taking, but the right of the captor to the captive's tribute stems from far more complex and deep-rooted mechanisms that 'entangle' warfare, power, and the justification for socially sanctioned killing in ways that remain masked by the concept of 'ransom'.

None of this takes away from McAnany's accomplishment, however. I recommend the book to Mesoamericanists for its insights and research models, and to those outside the field as a means of accessing the full breadth and details of Maya economies in social context.

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