

The Elusive Maya Marketplace: An Archaeological Consideration of the Evidence

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Abstract The modeling of ancient Maya economies has been a dynamic area of archaeological research in the past few decades, but in most cases there has been little attention on how goods actually changed hands. Through an overview of the literature, this paper considers marketplace exchange as one mechanism of distribution. Researchers have proposed a number of physical features and artifact characteristics that may be expected in association with marketplace activity, and new methods of data collection have been offered that can be used to build a case for marketplace exchange. What remains is the challenge of developing strategies to identify ancient Maya marketplaces convincingly through archaeological excavation.

Keywords Maya · Marketplace · Market economy · Mesoamerica · Trade

Introduction

The past half-century of archaeological research on the prehispanic Maya has shown that their economies were much more complex than originally thought. The ability of emerging elites to exert control over land, manual labor, raw material, the production of specialty goods, and trade is now seen as a key component in the expansion of political and religious power. The consideration of economic influences is central in modeling both the initial development of Maya civilization and the many fluctuations in power and wealth that took place over the following centuries. With all this attention on Maya economies, one aspect remains largely unexplored—the means of distribution, whether by gifting, tribute, redistribution,

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