

1-2015

## Utatlán: The Constituted Community of the K'iche' Maya of Q'umarkaj [Review]

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### Repository Citation

Mathews, J. (2015). [Review of the book *Utatlán: The constituted community of the K'iche' Maya of Q'umarkaj*, by T. F. Babcock]. *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 34, 138-140. doi: 10.1111/blr.12288

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Backcock, Thomas F. (2012) *Uatatlán: The Constituted Community of the K'iche' Maya of Q'umarkaj*, University Press of Colorado (Boulder, CO), + 341 pp. \$60.12 hbk.

This volume is the culmination of fieldwork that was carried out in the 1970s at Greater Uatatlán, made up of several communities surrounding the ceremonial centre of Q'umarkaj and the famed home of the *Popol Wuj*. Although he completed his dissertation in 1980, Babcock freely admits that life got in the way of publishing at the time, and I commend him for returning to it three decades later. This temporal distance offers the advantage of being able to review the initial work within the context of later research and to incorporate the wisdom attained since the initial writing of the dissertation. However, it has the disadvantage in some cases of dated references, methods and technology. Nonetheless, the volume is carefully written, including a thorough background to the study, plainly defined geographical, temporal and linguistic terms and excellent detail in the methodology and research questions. The goal of the volume is to lay out the findings from excavations conducted in the residential zone of Greater Uatatlán and to define the 'constituted community' as understood by the ancient residents.

Chapter 1 emphasises that, although the Spanish and other early visitors described only the site centre and not the residential zone, the Maya saw it as a united community. Babcock provides a detailed synthesis of the social organisation of the site, attempting to integrate the concepts of the civil and urban community. He looks at the processual and diachronic views of the city, as well as the implications of economic specialisation in urban development, to understand regional development. He reviews various models (chiefdom, state, urbanism, trade and community) as frameworks for understanding archaeological sites, and asks how archaeologists can understand the site emically 400 years after abandonment. Chapter 2 provides the geological background to explain the physical divisions within the site, and then provides linguistic and ethnohistoric support for the origins of the K'iche. Chapter 3 covers methodology, which thoroughly relays the process used by the project to clarify the residential zone, and provides feature and artifact typologies. It also discusses the complications of working in Guatemala during an era of increasing civil unrest. Chapter 4 is an overview of the studies conducted in the communities on the surrounding plateaus, demonstrating evidence of small settlements dating from the Preclassic to the Postclassic that engaged in small-scale craft specialization, such as obsidian workshops, ceramics and metallurgy. Chapter 5 describes the testing done at the site of Resguardo, a hillside complex that lies just to the east of Q'umarkaj. Excavations have revealed evidence of an elite residential area nestled within terraces, as well as ritual burials, altars, metallurgy practices, ground stone and obsidian artifacts. Chapter 6 describes the excavations conducted on the Resguardo-Pakaman Ridge, which is the plateau closest to the ceremonial centre of Q'umarkaj; These studies have focused on several non-elite house-lots, with evidence of burials, cremations, temescals and even a possible game board. Chapter 7 reviews the findings of an unusual hillside mound surrounded by obsidian debitage and projectile points. The mound contained three construction phases with plaster floors, a high number of polychrome ceramics, figurines, censers and altars. Several burials, including a box-like tomb made of plastered pumice stones containing jade, gold bowls, ear spools and pendants, were also recovered. Chapter 8 focuses on the site of Pakaman, a hilltop complex of residential structures, a plaza and a temple, that may have served as a military garrison. The site contained several burials but few stone artifacts or decorated ceramics, which was surprising given its location adjacent to the temple and a possible royal residence. Chapter 9 examines La Comunidad, the last area tested within the residential

zone of Greater Utlán. Excavations there revealed that the area was probably not residential but instead included several defensive features, as well as an obsidian workshop. Chapter 10 wrestles with the question of how to define spatial boundaries for Greater Utlán by looking at artifact density from tested areas, relating that to the amount of human activity that occurred. Analysis of ceramics across the communities showed that occupation zones adjacent to Q'umarkaj had higher levels of occupation than zones further from the site core. Babcock then summarises the residential patterns, burial patterns and radiocarbon dates of each zone, concluding in the final chapter that, although the architectural features within Greater Utlán are generally of lower status than those at the ceremonial core, the surrounding areas show great variability in terms of occupation periods and levels of habitation, craft specialisation, defensive functions and ritual activities. In other words, it is a material reflection of the great social complexity of this ancient settlement, and an insight into the way in which ancient residents must have viewed it.

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