Chapter 5 slips neatly into a review of the main international agencies (and their sometimes perplexingly similar acronyms) that have a mandate for the protection of tangible and intangible heritage, their relationship with national and non-governmental bodies with similar responsibilities, the relatively few examples of the use of ‘development aid’ (mainly by Scandinavian countries) to fund archaeological research – as in the Urban Origins programme and its successors supported by SIDA (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency). The chapter also summarises the varied international treaties and conventions that are supposed to hold everything together. As with the previous chapters, this is a good general introduction which many students will find helpful. Nonetheless, I would have liked to have seen some coverage of recent Africa-driven initiatives such as the recently completed ‘Africa 2009’ programme of activities supported by ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property). Chapter 6 picks up on discussions of the potential impacts of future climate change, globalisation and urban development raised in Chapter 3, to review other examples of ‘development aid’ supporting archaeological and other heritage projects. This includes critical discussion of some of the World Bank funded projects; various capacity building programmes such as the work of AFRICOM (International Council of African Museums) and CHDA (Centre for Heritage Development in Africa) in Mombasa – although the latter’s Francophone counterpart (EPA or Ecole du Patrimoine Africain) in Proto-Novo, which is also supported by ICCROM, is not mentioned – and some smaller scale non-governmental organisation and university supported efforts.

Chapter 7 is more reflective, examining some of the more contested issues with which an archaeology informed by the broader objectives and structures of international development engagement with Africa is beginning to contend. These are selective, but include concepts of heritage and value, colonialism and post-colonial archaeologies, famine, community archaeology and forensic archaeology. Case material on each of these is introduced and discussed with reference to some of the ethical, practical and theoretical questions they raise. These points are revisited in the concluding chapter which also sets out a provisional ‘road map’ for devising more sustainable archaeological practice on the continent, which the authors hope others will develop, modify and transform.

Rather surprisingly, given the importance often placed on producing ‘useable pasts’, the Africanist archaeological community has at times been reluctant to engage directly with the main international development issues of the day. This is, perhaps, because of a concern that an interest in ‘the past’ and historical events and processes will be dismissed as irrelevant to the contemporary interests of the core agencies, their paymasters and governments of the day. While slim, containing some inaccuracies, a few unfortunate omissions (where, for example, is the discussion of indigenous archaeology as opposed to ‘community’ archaeology?), and an irritating use of the term ‘structuralist’ when clearly ‘structural’ is meant, this book will, I hope, provide the inspiration to re-engage and to demonstrate just how important Africa’s past is for helping to plot a more sustainable future.

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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.

References


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