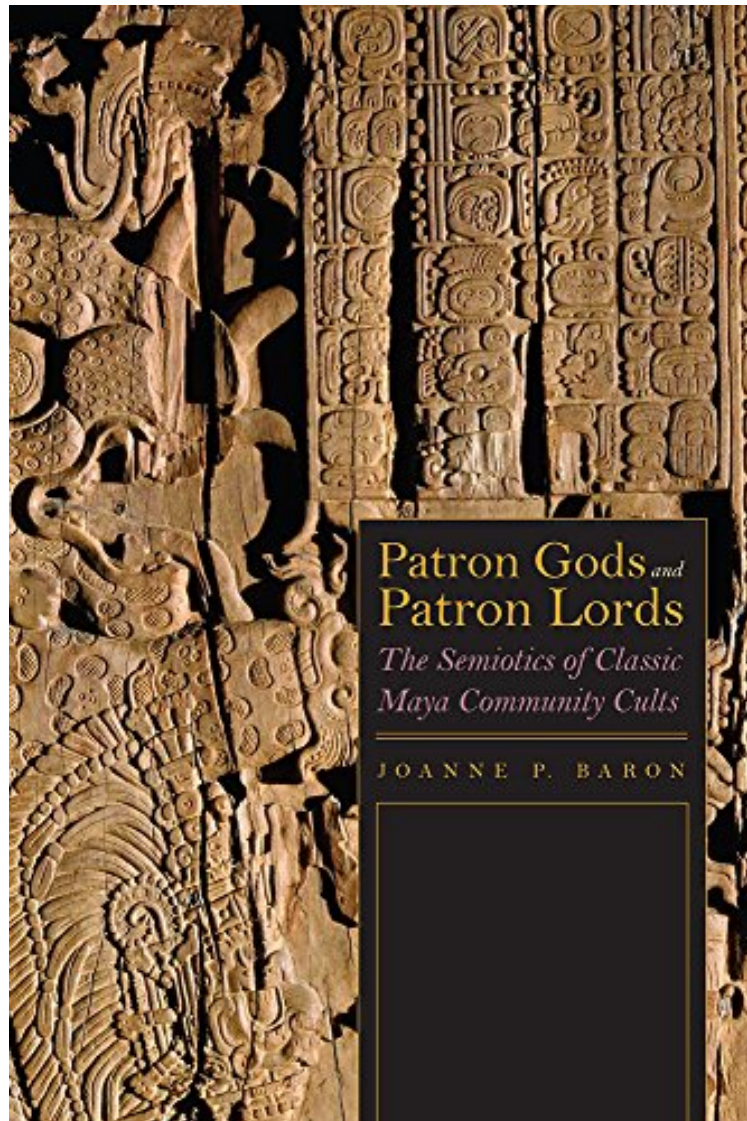


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# Patron Gods and Patron Lords: The Semiotics of Classic Maya Community Cults

Joanne Baron

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**Joanne Baron : Patron Gods and Patron Lords: The Semiotics of Classic Maya Community Cults** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Patron Gods and Patron Lords: The Semiotics of Classic Maya Community Cults:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. An excellent study, and useful for non-Mayanists By A Graduate Student This is a valuable book for several reasons. First, it is a study of Classic Maya religion that does not have a

world tree in sight. Baron's focus on the practice of Classic Maya religion and its interpenetration with political life moves the discipline of Maya studies in the right direction, and provides a useful, contemporary point of entry into Maya studies for scholars in other disciplines. For those of us who have been dissatisfied with the representation of Maya religion and political ideology ("shaman kings!") in the general academic literature for some time, Baron has done the hard work of actually writing something that can communicate more recent ideas to a broader audience. The book is very clearly written, with an unpretentious style free of jargon (all technical terms are defined at the outset), furthering the accessibility of the text. Moreover, the book captures an important recent trend in Maya scholarship towards on-the-ground analyses of how individual Maya states operated. Baron's book offers useful insights in this regard, because she is sensitive to variability in practice between different political communities, and discusses both how patron deity cults were used within particular communities AND in the construction of hierarchical relationships between polities. I give the book 4 rather than 5 stars because of a few minor gripes. First, it's only 172 pages long, minus references and a substantial (useful!) appendix. A few sections of the text could have been expanded to justify the price of admission (this is true of many books in archaeology). Specifically, some of the epigraphic details could have benefited from more extensive discussion. Finally, the specific narrative she proposes as an interpretation of her own excavations--dueling lineages at La Corona, using ancestors and patron deities as competing claims on power--is plausible but some of the links are tenuous (again, an issue all archaeologists confront). I would like to have seen a more extensive discussion of alternative interpretations. These minor criticisms aside, I recommend Baron's book for Mayanists across the board, and for non-Mayanist scholars interested in comparative religion, ritual studies, or the relationship between religious and political practice.

In the first comprehensive treatment of Classic Maya patron deity veneration, Joanne P. Baron demonstrates the central importance of patron deity cults in political relationships between both rulers and their subjects and among different Maya kingdoms. Weaving together evidence from inscriptions, images, and artifacts, *Patron Gods and Patron Lords* provides new insights into how the Classic Maya polity was organized and maintained. Using semiotic theory, Baron draws on three bodies of evidence: ethnographies and manuscripts from Postclassic, Colonial, and modern Maya communities that connect patron saints to pre-Columbian patron gods; hieroglyphic texts from the Classic period that discuss patron deity veneration; and excavations from four patron deity temples at the site of La Corona, Guatemala. She shows how the Classic Maya used patron deity effigies, temples, and acts of devotion to negotiate group membership, social entitlements, and obligations between individuals and communities. She also explores the wider role of these processes in politics, arguing that rituals and discourses related to patron deities ultimately formulated Maya rulership as a locally oriented institution, which limited the ability of powerful kingdoms to create wider religious communities. Applying a new theoretical approach for the archaeological study of ideology and power dynamics, *Patron Gods and Patron Lords* reveals an overlooked aspect of the belief system of Maya communities.

A well-written and profoundly argued academic work. . . . Her study including archaeological, textual, and visual material is a model for future research. Christian Prager, Universität Bonn A compelling interpretation of the workings of ancient Maya polities . . . an especially important contribution. Robert Preucel, Brown University