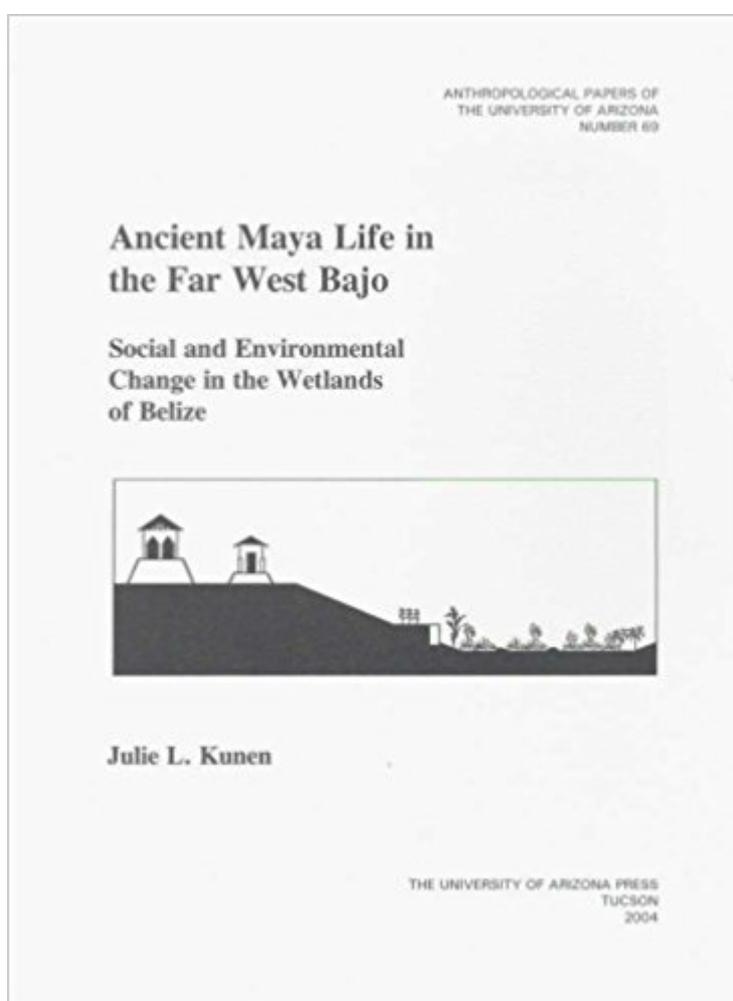


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Ancient Maya Life In The Far West Bajo: Social And Environmental Change In The Wetlands Of Belize (Anthropological Papers)



Synopsis

Human activity during centuries of occupation significantly altered the landscape inhabited by the ancient Maya of northwestern Belize. In response, the Maya developed new techniques to harvest the natural resources of their surroundings, investing increased labor and raw materials into maintaining and even improving their ways of life. In this lively story of life in the wetlands on the outskirts of the major site of La Milpa, Julie Kunen documents a hitherto unrecognized form of intensive agriculture in the Maya lowlands—a one that relied on the construction of terraces and berms to trap soil and moisture around the margins of low-lying depressions called bajos. She traces the intertwined histories of residential settlements on nearby hills and ridges and agricultural terraces and other farming-related features around the margins of the bajo as they developed from the Late Preclassic period (400 BC-AD 250) until the area's abandonment in the Terminal Classic period (about AD 850). Kunen examines the organization of three bajo communities with respect to the use and management of resources critical to agricultural production. She argues that differences in access to spatially variable natural resources resulted in highly patterned settlement remains and that community founders and their descendants who had acquired the best quality and most diverse set of resources maintained an elevated status in the society. The thorough integration of three lines of evidence—the settlement system, the agricultural system, and the ancient environment—breaks new ground in landscape research and in the study of Maya non-elite domestic organization. Kunen reports on the history of settlement and farming in a small corner of the Maya world but demonstrates that for any study of human-environment interactions, landscape history consists equally of ecological and cultural strands of influence.

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