

from this intimate glimpse into the life of a mentor to many women who followed her career path in the American Southwest.

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Pre-Mamom Pottery Variation and the Preclassic Origins of the Lowland Maya. Debra S. Walker, ed. Denver: University Press of Colorado, 2023, 670 pp. \$174.00, cloth. ISBN 978-1-64642-319-4.

The earliest evidence for the use of ceramics by ancestral peoples in the Maya lowlands, in Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador, comes from approximately 1000 to 600 BC, centuries later than elsewhere in Mesoamerica. Several analytical tensions characterize archaeological research on this time period, known as the Early Middle Preclassic, and associated material culture, defined here as “pre-Mamom.” The first question is whether these potters and consumers were descendants of peoples who had lived there for generations, or migrants, or both. The second is why, when pre-Mamom pottery appeared throughout the Yucatan Peninsula in seemingly few generations, did strong regional variations emerge in production and decoration?

This volume primarily addresses the second question with thirteen case studies from Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico, framed by three introductory and two concluding chapters. The contributions by some of the leading voices in archaeology and ceramic analysis comprise an exhaustive synthesis of almost a century of research on early pottery from the Maya region, inspired by a 2016 conference session organized by the volume’s editor, Debra S. Walker. All first authors hail from outside the region, however, signaling a potential ongoing imbalance in knowledge production in which local expertise might not have equal weight. Future conferences and extensive publications such as this should strive to foreground contributions of in-country scholars and relevant Indigenous perspectives on the shared past.

Walker’s introduction is helpful and accessible, laying out the main research questions and hypotheses about the lowland communities’ impulse to use durable pottery containers in settled villages around 1000 BC, including factors such as greater emphasis on maize agriculture, using lime to enhance the nutritive value of maize (nixtamalization), and growth of preexisting long-distance exchange networks. The paired introductory chapters by Jon C. Lohse and Robert M. Rosenswig address the major practical and theoretical considerations for research on this time period, with Lohse giving an overview of best practices for comparing radiocarbon dates to construct accurate chronologies. Rosenswig follows with a “thought piece” in which he concludes that “the first ceramic-using villagers . . . were descendants of foraging peoples who had long occupied

the area" (p. 57) and contextualizes the Maya case study within both Mesoamerica and the global past. He challenges archaeologists to "outgrow the legacy of our culture-historical disciplinary history that still prompts many to equate ceramic styles with ethnic groups" (p. 77).

Other chapters provide thorough summaries of pre-Mamom materials from sites long associated with the origins of Maya royal courts, such as Cahal Pech, Belize; Ceibal, Guatemala; and Yaxuna, Mexico. Fresh perspectives emerge from chapters that detail recent analyses from sites such as Pacbitun, Belize; Nakum, Guatemala; and Yaxnohcah, Mexico. The addition of significant materials from these recently excavated sites underscores that this book is only a first step in pushing the field forward. Ceramicist readers will rejoice in the abundant profile drawings and selected color images, invaluable for comparison in future projects. There are also methodological recommendations, notably from Takeshi Inomata, who proposes clear guidelines for reporting ceramics by stratigraphic unit, which avoids the "need to wait for the completion of many years of excavations or the final establishment of type classifications" (p. 194). Michael G. Callaghan's chapter on Mars Orange Paste Ware, likely produced in Belize and exchanged over long distances, provides an important model for documenting and reporting trade wares.

One area of scholarship that could enhance this collection, also noted by Michael Love in his concluding chapter, would have been a full treatment of the aesthetics of pre-Mamom pottery, including the forms, surface decorations, and incised designs. A brief summary of previous iconographic studies is found in the chapter by Lauren A. Sullivan and Jaime J. Awe, and Nina Nievens's discussion of the assemblages from Holmul and Tikal, Guatemala, connects the symbolic dimension of pre-Mamom pottery to the emergence of feasting as Maya elite practice. As Love cogently notes, "variants of all these motifs are common throughout Mesoamerica, but . . . we need a full dictionary of the designs, along with frequency data, to sort out the strengths of the relationships" (p. 509).

A book about regional ceramic technology is necessarily for a limited audience, indispensable for a very select group of English-speaking specialists in Maya archaeology, but with little broad appeal for a general reader. The list price is prohibitive for graduate students, who would most benefit from this resource, or for archaeologists from the countries represented within. Despite these potential barriers to accessing its information, this volume represents an important leap forward in the investigations into the origins of ancient Maya civilization.

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