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This book began as a session for the 82nd Annual Meeting of the Society for American Anthropology designed to explore how crafting in Formative Mesoamerican communities illustrated differing processes of complexity. The idea of complexity as a process originated in discussions with the first editor's (Lisa DeLance) doctoral advisor, Dr. Wendy Ashmore, to whom this volume is dedicated. These discussions, often spontaneous intellectual exercises, were nearly always framed around deconstructing and probing the assumptions that have driven archaeological interpretation for the past century. These highly meaningful moments shaped Lisa's graduate school experience and fundamentally frame her approach to archaeological knowledge.

During one discussion, shortly before Wendy fell ill in 2017, I (Lisa) asked her one of the most complex questions yet to be answered: *How did we get here?* I was pondering the practical experience of a social group moving from an egalitarian to a highly stratified form of social organization. From that frankly absurdly abstract question came a series of discussions focused on the lived experience of social change in the present. How are certain types of leadership and certain

qualities of leaders normalized, indeed idealized? How do cultural norms, standards, and values develop and change over time, such that they are experienced as natural? What is the impetus for change? How is it felt and negotiated at the micro-level? They are, indeed, complex questions.

Complexity has long fascinated archaeologists. Whether overtly explored or latently present in the interpretation of the past, issues of social complexity (the when, the why, the how) permeate our explorations of the human past. Complexity research, at its core, attempts to understand *how* and *under what circumstances* the similarities and divisions impacting our daily lived experience originated.

This is both a question that the larger public is grappling with in an increasingly polarized and uncertain time and a question that archaeologists have long attempted to answer. From the outset, this volume sought to explore complexity through a comparative lens and took a pan-Mesoamerican approach to facilitate the comparison of the emergence of unique social conditions and the circumstances in which they were experienced. We felt it important to bridge the scholarly gap in Mesoamerican research that tends to explore individual cultural groups as isolates rather than part of a contiguous system of interaction. The incorporation of data from Oaxaca, Central Mexico, the Yucatán, the Petén, and the eastern Maya Lowlands allows scholars to compare historical sequences of complexity and the establishment of group identity on a diverse scale throughout Mesoamerica.

Models of complexity in Mesoamerica are variable. Not only is there lack of consensus as to what specific social features illustrate complexity, there is also a general trend toward exploring complexity in the context of the “grandiose” rather than the “mundane.” Models, by necessity, require researchers to employ typological classifications of specific social features and practically function as a set of “diagnostic criteria” for determining whether a society is complex. While the use of models of complexity is important in the generalizability of theories about complexity, they simultaneously disregard aspects of social differentiation that impact inter and intra-group relationships and the identities that develop from them.

This volume is guided by three fundamental questions: (1) How and when did social aggregations become more complex? What are the processes involved? In what way were they complex and how does that differ from other regions of Mesoamerica; (2) How and when did particular ethnic identities and affiliations emerge in the context of cultural affiliations; and (3) What are key aspects of regional and macroregional variability. Volume contributors address these questions as they apply to the development of complexity in Western and Central Mexico, the Yucatán, and the Maya Lowlands. The authors in this volume do not employ linear or uniform models in their analysis. Complexity in each case

is explored as a process at a community level through the lens of evidence-based correlates to complex behavior in a local, regional, and supra-regional scales. We hope that as an example of the intellectual legacy of Wendy Ashmore, these chapters will elicit further exploration of novel approaches to long-standing archaeological questions.

This volume could not have been completed without the valued support and assistance of our editor, Darrin Pratt. Darrin and his team were welcoming, efficient, and insightful at all stages of this book's production, and we are grateful. The editors and the authors also owe a debt of gratitude to the local peoples who allowed us to investigate Mesoamerica's deep past on their lands and to the field and lab crews who assisted us in carrying out the research that we draw on here.