
EDITORIAL REMARKS

With this issue, *Ancient Mesoamerica* completes its twentieth production year—our first *katun*. The journal was the vision of founding editors William R. Fowler and Stephen D. Houston, supported by Vanderbilt University and especially Cambridge University Press. As they expressed in their opening editorial “A new journal based on an old idea” (Fowler and Houston 1990a:1), *Ancient Mesoamerica* was inspired by Eduard Seler’s and Paul Kirchhoff’s holistic concept of ‘Mesoamerica.’ They created the journal “to emphasize...the integral nature of the region and to provide a forum for those who want to explore, in an interdisciplinary fashion, the many ethnographic, linguistic, archaeological, and historical dimensions of the Mesoamerican past.” Manuscripts were selected that emphasized methodological innovations, theoretical advances, recent discoveries, and general syntheses. A unique feature of the journal became the inclusion of Special Sections, where a number of scholars could address a common theme from distinct perspectives.

Over the past 20 years, *Ancient Mesoamerica* has published nearly 7,000 pages of text in about 500 articles. These have covered a wide gamut of topics. Special Sections have included detailed considerations of single sites as well as regions, and specialized production such as obsidian and textiles. Due to the holistic approach to our subject area, *Ancient Mesoamerica* has become one of the major venues for epigraphic breakthroughs, art historical analyses, and integrated ethnohistorical and archaeological interpretation. Areal coverage has ranged from northern Mexico to lower Central America.

The issue of areal coverage raises an important theoretical question: to what extent is ‘Mesoamerica’ still a viable concept? As noted, the seed for the journal lay in the concepts of Seler and Kirchhoff, who were brilliant scholars of the early- to mid-twentieth century laboring under theoretical paradigms of diffusion and culture history. Does ‘Mesoamerica’ still work in the new millennium? Clearly the field is much more sophisticated now, and much of the ideological baggage of those early years has been rejected. But as Fowler and Houston noted in their initial editorial, the objective of the journal was to showcase the integrated nature of the region rather than myopic fixations on sites or sub-regions. As archaeologists now working on the southern fringe of Mesoamerica (McCafferty in Pacific Nicaragua and Fowler in El Salvador), we find it relatively easy to recognize the overarching similarities that unify Mesoamerica even as the inherent heterogeneities continue to be revealed.

The concept of ‘Mesoamerica’ still seems to work, as the journal is at an all-time high in both subscriptions and submissions. In recognition of the high volume, Cambridge University Press has agreed to increase the page length of individual issues beginning in 2010. In the past year, color images have been included in particularly significant cases, such as Ringle’s (2009) article on the Chichen Itza murals. Other innovations include the inauguration of the journal’s web site at www.ancientmesoamerica.net, as well as the creation of a Facebook group. These developments all serve to bring the community of Mesoamericanists together to share ideas and information in a more dynamic way than was possible even 20 years ago.

So as we close out the first *katun* of *Ancient Mesoamerica*, the editors thought it would be useful to celebrate with something completely different. Mesoamerican studies have taken a leading role in archaeological advances, in part because the quality of the data is so rich, the continuity with both historical and living groups is detailed and abundant, and because the ‘exotic’ nature of the subject tends to captivate both lay and scholarly attention. Hollywood has certainly taken note! To commemorate this, we asked some of the most prominent scholars in our discipline to write a ‘state of the art’ summation of their specialties. The articles included in this special issue cover many of the key topics in the field. Authors were given instructions to briefly summarize the background for their essays, the developments that have occurred in the past 20 years, and then provide direction for where their field should go in the next *katun*. They were also to provide a comprehensive bibliography that has been painstakingly collated as a resource for future investigation; this will be posted on the *Ancient Mesoamerica* webpage for easy consultation and further development.

Obviously not all topics could be covered in this issue, in part due to the hectic schedules of leading scholars as well as space limitations of the journal itself. We hope this will inspire (or provoke) others to step up and send us additional manuscripts on topics that we have omitted. A forum for discussing these and other themes is available on the webpage.

Our first *katun* has seen many important advances, as spotlighted in these articles and in the 500 articles that have graced the pages of the journal over the past 20 years. We look forward to seeing what the next 20 will reveal, as we re-write history with each pass of the trowel.

GEOFFREY G. MCCAFFERTY
WILLIAM R. FOWLER