

PREFACE

Lidar has enabled the field of Mesoamerican settlement studies to advance far beyond its previous successes by permitting, at unprecedented scale, the identification of archaeological features that are often not easily seen and recorded. The ability to harness this data, in conjunction with existing archaeological survey and excavation materials, has empowered us to develop well-conceived and comparable population estimates for ancient Maya cities. We believe that the chapters in this volume attest to the fact that, while still difficult, ancient settlement studies in Mesoamerica have made great progress in understanding the spatial and temporal dimensions of past populations. These same data also highlight the variability in past settlement patterns and make evident that the trajectories of Mesoamerican cities, and the rise and fall of population levels, is dependent on local conditions and histories.

This volume had its origins in a session planned for the April 2020 meeting of the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) in Austin, Texas. We and other authors in the book had long declared the need to provide similarly derived population estimates as a means to allow for comparisons with settlements and cities across Mesoamerica and beyond. Our plan was to assemble a group of individuals who had useful data and archaeological experience from a variety of locales in Mesoamerica to address the issues involved in establishing population reconstructions. To accomplish this, we circulated an earlier version of the introductory chapter to all session participants to establish some parameters for the discussions that would follow. We hoped that the SAA meetings in Austin, Texas, in spring 2020 would provide the opportunity for information sharing and dialogue—and all the participants in this volume had committed to a population session and had prepared abstracts by September 2019. The COVID pandemic, however, threw all of our plans into disarray.

The following year, the planned population session took place virtually during the online 2021 SAA meetings. While session participants

faithfully listened to online recordings of each other's papers, both during the initial digital recording session and as videos during the appointed session time, the full-bodied discussion we were looking for never ensued because of the format.

When we had submitted the original SAA session, however, we had also applied to be considered for a subsequent Amerind Foundation session in Dragoon, Arizona, and were exceedingly grateful to be selected. We scheduled the second session on Mesoamerican population at the Amerind Foundation for late September 2021. And then, COVID struck again. The rates of infection went up substantially in late summer 2021, making it difficult to gather all our session participants for discussion or even to travel, especially if coming from outside the United States, with all the new COVID-related travel restrictions. Thus, the second session—and what would have been the first in-person interaction of the group—was postponed once more, until April 2022.

We were indeed able to enjoy the wonderful facilities provided by the Amerind Foundation for our meeting in April 2022. For selecting our session and for hosting our group in southern Arizona, we wish to sincerely thank Eric Kaldahl; he has also helped to ensure that the resulting volume would be published in a timely manner, after peer review, through the auspices of the University of Arizona Press.

From April 20 to 24, nine of us were able to assemble in Dragoon, Arizona, to meet in person at the Amerind Foundation (the three editors of this volume, Charlotte Arnauld, Gary Feinman, Scott Hutson, José Lobo, Chris Pool, and Travis Stanton), with others (Marcello Canuto, Larry Gorenflo, Deb Nichols, and Ian Robertson) joining the sessions by Zoom. The ability to gather at the Amerind and not only listen to presentations, but engage in substantial dialogue was key to finishing this project. Without this meeting, it would not have been possible to assemble this book.

In the time between the Arizona meeting and compiling the chapters in this book, we have also lost one of our colleagues, Deb Nichols, to cancer. Her participation in our SAA and Amerind discussions and her insights into Mesoamerican archaeology are and will continue to be sorely missed—and, accordingly, this book is dedicated to her.

We have always thought that the topic addressed in this volume—the consideration of population history over both space and time—was im-

portant and necessary for contextualizing our archaeological data and in making these data relevant outside the field. We hope that our chapters will prove useful to future scholars for comparative data and discussions of how to determine the sizes of Mesoamerican populations, their developments over time, their spatial organization, and the various forms of Mesoamerican urbanism.

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