Greater Mesoamerica: Between the Mexican Central Plateau and the American Southwest

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The editors of this volume and their colleagues are well known to scholars of Mesoamerican archaeology, particularly to researchers who work in Central Plateau (Meseta Central) and environs as well as west and northwest Mexico. Michael Foster is project director for the cultural resources program at the Gila River Indian Community and resides in Phoenix, Arizona. Foster co-edited, with Phil Weigand’s, a volume entitled The Archaeology of West and Northwest Mesoamerica (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985). Shirley Gorenstein is professor emerita of anthropology, Rensselaer Polytechnical Institute. She is the author of a brief general textbook, Introduction to Archaeology (New York: Basic Books, 1965), and notable monographs on west Mexico. Among the latter are Tepeix el Viejo: A Postclassic Fortified Site in the Mixteca-Puebla Region of Mexico (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1973), Acambaro: Frontier Settlement on the Tarascan-Aztec Border (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University, Publications in Anthropology, 1985) and Tarascan Civilization: A Late Prehispanic Cultural System, co-author with Helen Pollard (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, Publications in Anthropology, 1983). She was the supervising editor of the textbook, Prehispanic America (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1974; London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), and a companion archaeological synthesis entitled North America (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1975). There is no doubt as to the editors’ skills and excellent credentials.

The editors and contributors assert and document with their collective field research and the syntheses provided in this volume that the term “Greater Mesoamerica” expands the traditional definition of what is normally perceived to be the culture area of “Mesoamerica.” In the initial chapter, the editors discuss the background of this culture area, the early exclusion of West and Northwest Mexico, chronological systems, and geographic and ecological factors. It is worth reviewing some of their introductory remarks. In 1943 Paul Kirchhoff in his classic article “Mesoamerica: Sus limites geograficas, composition etnica y caracteres culturales” (Acta Americana 1:92-107) defined the area, refining a paradigm devised by William H. Holmes in 1914. Using cultural traits plotted geographically, the regions of west and northwest Mexico on the northern Mesoamerican periphery were excluded from Mesoamerica and were also separate from another culture area, the American Southwest. For the first 60 years of the 20th century, a handful of individuals conducted research in these two regions—Alfred V. Kidder, Isabel Kelly, Carl Sauer, Donald Brand, Gordon Ekholm, J. Charles Kelley, Betty Bell, Clement Meighan, Charles Di Peso, Eduardo Noguera, and Carroll Riley, among others.

Eric Wolf examined the history of the northern
boundary of Mesoamerica subsequently in his delightful, thought-provoking *Sons of the Shaping Earth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959). With revisions (notably by Pedro Armillas in 1964), the Mesoamerican boundaries have been published on maps in major textbooks written by Gordon R. Willey (1966) and Muriel Porter Weaver (1972, with more recent editions in 1981 and 1993). [1] Interestingly, Foster and Gorenstein do not mention Section X on Mexico in Alfred L. Kroeber’s ecologically oriented *Cultural and Natural Areas of Native North America* (Berkeley: University of California, Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, Vol. 38, 1939), which also considers boundaries.

A volume entitled *El occidente de Mexico* (Mexico: Sociedad Mexicana de Antropologia, 1947), was an initial attempt to collect information on the western regions. But with the publication of the *Handbook of Middle American Indians* (HMAI) in the 1960s and 1970s, archaeological research in Mesoamerica expanded dramatically thereafter, particularly in the Meseta Central, the Maya Highlands, the Valley of Oaxaca, and the Gulf Coast. Individual chapters in the Handbook authored by Bell, Chadwick, Kelley, Lister, and Meighan, and published in 1971 covering Nayarit, Jalisco, Colima, Guerrero, Michoacan, Sinaloa, Zacatecas, and Durango provided a baseline for research north and west of the Mesoamerican culture area frontier. [2] However, there has been a virtual explosion of interest, field research, and publication on the archaeological cultures and regions of west and northwest Mexico during the past three decades, particularly during the past dozen years.

The book’s dust jacket blurb asserts that this volume constitutes “the first comprehensive overview of both regions [west and northwest Mexico] since the *Handbook of Middle American Indians* was published in the early 1970s.” This isn’t quite true. Betty Bell’s edited synthesis, *The Archaeology of West Mexico* (Ajijic, Jalisco: Sociedad de Estudios Avanzados del Occidente de Mexico, 1974) and the Michael Foster and Phil Weigand edited volume *The Archaeology of West and Northwest Mesoamerica* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985) were among earlier serious attempts at synthesizing these regions. A Spanish-language scholarly treatment edited by B. Bohem de Lameiras and Weigand, entitled *Origen y desarrollo de la civilizacion en el occidente de Mexico* (Zamora: El Colegio de Michoacan, 1992), is a significant resource. Likewise, Jonathan Reyman’s edited *The Gran Chichimeca: Essays on the Archaeology and Ethnohistory of Northern Mesoamerica* (Aldershot, UK: Avebury, 1995), developed from a 1985 Society for American Archaeology symposium is another notable contribution.

The chapters that comprise Foster and Gorenstein’s volume are revised from papers originally presented at the first roundtable meeting of the Center for Indigenous Studies in the Americas (CISA) which was entitled “Cultural Dynamics of Precolumbian West and Northwest Mexico,” held over three-day period in Phoenix in February 1992. The Wenner-Gren Foundation provided conference support for Anthropological Research and the CISA, a non-profit branch of Soil Systems, Inc., a cultural resource management firm. The discussants for the papers were Jeffrey Dean and E. Charles Adams. Collectively the published volume has a Forward, Preface and 15 numbered chapters. A total of 135 figures, 52 endnotes (from only four chapters), three tables, and a seven-page conflated double-column index of proper nouns and topical terms emend the essays. A particular strength of the book is its compilation of 971 references (pp. 263-296), essential for any future scholarship. I shall summarize briefly the individual chapters and provide some comments prior to an overall assessment of the book.

As noted, in “Chapter One: West and Northwest Mexico: The Ins and Outs of Mesoamerica” (pp. 3-19, 5 figures) editors Gorenstein and Foster consider the perceptions of Mesoamerica as a culture area with emphasis on the northern and western frontiers, but they also assess the chronological systems used by various authors and provide succinct summaries of the subsequent chapters. This essay is compelling and essential to the reader’s comprehension of the chapters that follow since it places the issue of frontiers in content, and shows how the individual contributions relate to the greater whole. Maps of the archaeological sites, natural ecological regions, climate, and mean annual precipitation derive from chapters in the initial volume of the *Handbook of Middle American Indians* (1964) are adequate, although this reader believes that more up-to-date sources might have been used. Although each chapter is characterized, there is no overall editorial summary or assessment. Mike Spence does provide something of that in the penultimate chapter.

“Chapter Two: The Late Terminal Preclassic in Southeastern Guanajuato: Heartland or Periphery? ” (pp. 21-33, 9 figures) by Charles A. Florance (Clifton Park, NY) is an evaluation of 43 archaeological sites from the Puroaguita area and a refinement of the chronology based on his study of 7,000+ potsherds dating to the Early Chupicuaro, Chupicuaro, and Mixtlan phases. His conclusion is that there was a population movement from
the west of Mexico along the Rio Lerma during the Early Chupicuaro phase. The new settlements being established, he contends, are peripheral to those located in the Jalisco highland lake area during Early Chupicuaro. However, in the subsequent Chupicuaro phase evidence of inter-regional exchange with sites in the Basin of Mexico is evidenced and he postulates that Cuicuilco, a major settlement in the southern Basin of Mexico, promoted this activity. The evaluation is based on the study of ceramics and figurines. However, the eruption of the volcano Xitle terminated Cuicuilco’s hegemony in the Basin and interrupted the economic connections with Guanajuato. Clearly the interpretation of the Chupicuaro site is a key to understanding the Basin of Mexico-Guanajuato connection. Florance presents new arguments about local developments and interrelationships that do not rely on the Cuicuilco model, hence, southeastern Guanajuato may be seen as a periphery or as a heartland as spatial and temporal scales change.

With “Chapter Three: A Summary of the Archaeology of North-Central Mesoamerica: Guanajuato, Querétaro, and San Luis Potosí” (pp. 35-42, 7 figures) by Beatriz Braniff C. (Institute Nacional de Antropologia e Historia, Centro Colima), the reader is exposed to an evaluation of the area north of the Rio Lerma, particularly to localities—Bajio and Tunal Grande. Her analysis raises questions about the current beliefs about relationships between the Chupicuaro phase and subsequent Mixtlan phase chronology. By employing finite local chronologies based upon ceramic analysis, she provides clearer evidence of the relationships of archaeological phases across a number of regions in Guanajuato, Zacatecas, Michoacan, Querétaro, and highland Jalisco. This “north-central” regional tradition is widely distributed by BCE/CE and by CE 250 the Bajio region has a well-defined settlement pattern with cities, town, and satellite settlements. Notably, there are cultural contacts with Teotihuacan, a dominant polity located in the northeastern Basin of Mexico, and with the Teuchitlan tradition of highland Jalisco. A Toltec cultural tradition deriving from the region of Tula, Estado de Hidalgo is evidenced between CE 600 to 850, overlapping the period of the demise of Teotihuacan hegemony and the influx of Toltec culture into that region from the northwest. Changes in the horticultural subsistence patterns ca. CE 900 are reflected in settlement, demographic, and societal manifestations, although a Toltec revival is discerned ca. CE 1000 to 1200.

Phil C. Weigand (Colegio de Michoacan and Museum of Northern Arizona) is the author of Chapter Four: The Evolution and Decline of a Core of Civilization: The Teuchitlan Tradition and the Archaeology of Jalisco” (pp. 43-58, 7 figures). His evaluation of the highland lake districts of western Jalisco emends and expands greatly his earlier research in this area, and he devises a chronology that begins with the Paleoindian period and extends into the Postclassic. Weigand considers differential sociocultural development and core-periphery relationships in the 1,000-year Teuchitlan tradition leading to a probable state-level society. Among the characteristics are the concept of circularity in architecture, societal intensification, intense pressures on land and natural resources, the construction of terraces and chinampas to maximize maize cultivation, and the erection of fortifications in the core area. He provides evidence that Teuchiitlan was an urban state-level society not unlike those of the Lowland Maya (rather than like the polities in the Basin of Mexico), but it began a sociopolitical decline in the late Classic period. Weigand considers the Classic period collapse and sociopolitical reorganization during the Postclassic, and offers three scenarios for the decline of the Teuchitlan tradition. The evidence for the Postclassic period is not entirely secure for the region but he had presented a compelling assessment updating his own prior interpretations.

“Chapter Five: Tarascans and Their Ancestors: Prehistory of Michoacan” (pp. 59-70, 7 figures, 1 table) by Helen Perlstein Pollard (Michigan State University) is the first of two chapters by Pollard. She begins with an assessment of the evidence of human occupation from the Paleoindian and Archaic periods (both not well represented in Michoacan) through the Preclassic with shaft tomb construction and maize domestication BCE 1500, and the development of Chupicuaro culture in the Rio Lerma Valley. Rapid demographic expansion and, the emergence of elite classes, the construction of ceremonial centers, and cultural contacts with Teotihuacan in the Basin of Mexico are distinctive traits of the Classic period. In the Postclassic, demographic nucleation in defensible locations in several lake basins accompanies a trend toward the formation of regional cultures, and a radical diminution of contact with the Basin of Mexico. Pollard next considers the development of Tarascan culture in the late Postclassic and the emergence of the Tarascan state in the Patzcuaro Basin, which expanded during the Protohistoric period into all of Michoacan and into Jalisco and Guerrero. Well known are Tarascan disputes with the Aztecs along the eastern frontier of the Tarascan polity. In “Chapter Six: Tarascan External Relationships” (pp. 71-80, 3 figures, 2 tables) Pollard expands our un-
nderstanding of the Tarascan-Aztec territorial conflict by examining social, economic, political, and military factors. The use of state merchants, control of obsidian resources, absorbing small states, and success in locating important raw materials are assessed. Pollard elaborates the distinctiveness of Tarascan culture versus the Aztec and also summarizes the 17 Tarascan-Aztec military engagements from CE 1430 to 1521 in west Mexico. These chapters update materials from her own book *Tariacuri’s Legacy: The Prehispanic Tarascan State* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993).

Missing from the citations is Pollard’s own “Recent Research in West Mexican Archaeology” *Journal of Archaeological Research* 5:345-384, 1997) which has 14 pages of bibliography including items on the Tarascans not cited in this chapter. Christopher T. Fisher, Helen P. Pollard, and Charles Frederick are the authors of “Intensive Agriculture and Socio-political Development in the Lake Patzcuaro Basin, Michoacan, Mexico” *Antiquity* 73(271): 642-649 (September 1999), cited as a conference paper in Foster and Gorenstein’s Bibliography (p. 272) but since published. Readers may wish to know that Tricia Gabany-Guerrero and Christine Hernandez are organizing a symposium entitled “Revising Tarascan Studies: Archaeological and Ethnohistorical Challenges for Late Post Classic and Early Colonial Research” for the 100th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Washington DC, to be held 14-18 November 2001.

Joseph B. Mountjoy (University of North Carolina at Greensboro) wrote “Chapter Seven: Prehispanic Cultural Development along the Southern Coast of West Mexico” (pp. 81-106, 14 figures), an assessment of a unique ecological region whose inhabitants exploited maritime resources, developed slash-and-burn maize horticulture, and had access to valuable mineral resources. The Preclassic Capacha tradition is related to El Openo in Michoacan, San Blas culture in Nayrit, and Tlatilco in the southern Basin of Mexico—the latter seen in ceramics and figurines. Subsequent to CE 300, Mountjoy discerns the Shaft Tomb and Tuxacuexco traditions, which he considers in terms of site distributions, sociopolitical features, economy, and external relations, including the exchange of coastal marine shell for highland obsidian (volcanic glass, an essential cutting tool). He also defines a Red-on-Buff ceramic tradition and the late Classic/Postclassic Aztatlan tradition with civic-ceremonial centers located in every large river valley in Jalisco and southern Sinaloa, and in the highlands along major commercial routes leading to central Mexico. He also notes that the origin and development of metalworking in this region is associated with the Aztatlan tradition, and the production and distribution of shell jewelry, pottery, and obsidian (especially at the Amapa site). Aztatlan ceramics with iconographic motifs were distributed northward into the Mexican states of Durango and Chihuahua, and into New Mexico, while Toltec plumbate ceramics and Mazapan-style figurines entered Aztatlan from central Mexico. Subsequent local cultural developments, demographic expansion, and sociopolitical fragmentation into small chiefdoms characterize the region prior to Spanish contact. This contribution updates Mountjoy’s “Some Important Resources for Prehispanic Cultures on the Coast of Mexico” (pp. 61-87) in *The Gran Chichimeca: Essays on the Archaeology and Ethnohistory of Northern Mesoamerica*, edited by Jonathan Reyma (Avebury, UK: Aldershot, 1995), which has additional salient information on resources including salt, marine shell, cotton, and exotic stones.

“Chapter Eight: The Prehistory of Mexico’s Northwest Coast: A View from the Marismas Nacionales of Sinaloa and Nayarit” (pp. 107-135, 22 figures) is written by Stuart D. Scott (professor emeritus, State University of New York at Buffalo) and Michael S. Foster (Phoenix, AZ). The coastal plain Marismas is a vast system of estuaries and lagoons that has been studied by Scott and his associates over a ten-year field project. Tectonic and ecological factors affected the nature and extent of prehistoric occupation of the area. Understanding these factors is essential to interpreting the prehistory of this complex area and the adaptive strategies used by the inhabitants. A unique shell mound, El Calon, a probable Formative (e.g. Preclassic) ceremonial center dated to about 3,700 years ago, which has a temple-like structure fashioned from the articulated shells of a large ribbed clam. There are two major ceramic period phases that define the period CE 400 to Spanish contact, but with a hiatus CE 900 to 1200. Most of the decorated pottery found at 500 shell middens associated with villages and hamlets is affiliated with cultures from Amapa, Nayarat and Chametla, Culiacan. There are detailed illustrations and explanations of Chametla, Aztatlan, and Early and Late Culiacaan polychrome ceramics. The authors also consider interactions between the West Coast cultures and Chalchihuites, Durango and what is termed the Aztatlan Mercantile System.

In Chapter Nine the late J. Charles Kelley writes extensively about a long distance trading model, “The Aztatlan Mercantile System: Mobile Traders and the Northwestward Expansion of Mesoamerican Civilization” (pp.
137-154, 4 figures, 11 endnotes). Using a mobile trader paradigm from ethnohistoric sources and new data from his excavations at the Schroeder site in Durango and from Canon del Molino, Durango, Kelley assesses the evidence for a distribution network for Aztatlan materials (turquoise, marine shell, cotton, etc.) in west and northwest Mexico, and links to central Mexico and the Mixteca-Puebla region. He presents evidence for the system operating from CE 900/950 to 1350/1400, and associates the development of the Paquime site (the more appropriate name for Casas Grandes which has Mogollon cultural roots) as a Mesoamerican “gateway” and part of a central place system or socioeconomic interaction sphere that brought Mesoamerican characteristics into the American Southwest and west Texas, but collapsed with Tarascan state expansion ca. CE 1450 to 1500. The distinction between the early (CE 950-1300) and late (1250-1400) systems is notable.

With “Chapter Ten: Archaeology of Southern Zacatecas: The Malpaso, Juchipila, and Valparaíso-Bolanos Valleys” (pp. 155-180, 22 figures, 18 endnotes) by Peter F. Jimenez Betts (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Centro Zacatecas) and J. Andrew Darling (Mexico-North Research Network, Chihuahua, Mexico), the focus of the essays changes to Zacatecas and the La Quemada and Chalchihuites areas. They summarize past research, and argue that the La Quemada and Chalchihuites cultures were initially similar but that these cultural traditions diverged significantly through time. Some recent thinking has homogenized these cultures into a singular pan-Chalchihuites cultural tradition that encompasses the La Quemada (Malpaso Valley), Chalchihuites, and Juchipila cultures of the region. Jimenez and Darling argue strenuously against this paradigm contending that this view ignores local archaeological sequences. The authors next discuss recent research in three valleys, emphasizing ceramics-derived chronologies: 1) Malpaso Valley dominated by the extensive site of La Quemada (ball court, columnar hall, plaza complexes, road systems, and domination of lesser communities); 2) Juchipila Valley sites linking southern Zacatecas and west Mexico; and 3) Valparaíso Valley (the La Florida site and Bolanos culture, and the site of Tonoate). Their assessment resolves problems in earlier research (Hrdlicka versus Kelley), suggests an obsidian procurement system, and refines chronologies. There are 25 raw material obsidian sources used in the production of prismatic blades for distribution throughout Zacatecas and adjacent areas. The authors pose new questions about the development of the large sites, nearly simultaneous florescence for all major sites (CE 650 to 800), and the mechanisms for the spread of cultural traits during the Epi-Classic period. Darling is opposed to a thesis Turner and Turner postulated in Man Corn: Cannibalism and Violence in the American Southwest (1999) that involves Mexican Toltec incursions into the Southwest. [3]

“Chapter Eleven: The Archaeoastronomical System in the Rio Colorado Chalchihuites Polity, Zacatecas: An Interpretation of the Chapin I Pecked Cross-Circle” (pp. 181-195, 12 figures, 11 endnotes) is by J. Charles and Ellen Abbott Kelley (Sul Ross State University). This essay offers a provocative interpretation of archaeoastronomical features at the sites of Alta Vista and Cerro Chapin, and emphasizes a pecked cross-circle at the latter ceremonial site that is nearly situated on the Tropic of Cancer. Similar cross-circles are found at Teotihuacan in the Basin of Mexico, and the Kelleys argue that Teotihuacan established Alta Vista. The “Labyrinth,” a structure at Alta Vista, is also reported and associated with equinox sunrises and the peak of Picacho Pelon in the Cerro de Chalchihuites. They also determined that other peaks and cross-circles at Alta Vista marked the summer and winter solstice sunrises. In addition, the Cerro Chapin I petroglyph is seen as related to the summer solstice. Each circle-cross is perceived to be unique and the authors invite a rigorous assessment of their paradigm. Anthony Aveni and John Carlson, leading scholars of archaeoastronomy, read or commented on the manuscript.

Michael Foster’s “Chapter Twelve: The Archaeology of Durango” (pp. 197-210, 13 figures) commences with a review of previous research, including early Spanish explorer accounts, and the beginning of systematic research by J. Charles Kelley in the 1950s. Foster begins with the Paleoeindian and Archaic evidence (both meager), and the development and spread of the Loma San Gabriel horticultural and pottery-making tradition from the Archaic Los Caracoles complex. The Loma San Gabriel is determined to be a non-Mesoamerican culture located in western Zacatecas and eastern Durango, 300 BCE to CE 1450. Settlement pattern and ceramic data are employed in the lack of systematic stratigraphic excavations, and much of what is reported about Chalchihuites culture is based on excavations at the Schroeder site. He considers that Loma may have given rise to the Canutillo phase in western Zacatecas but that expanding Chalchihuites culture in Durango displaced Loma. Aztatlan cultures penetrate the Durango highlands ca. CE 600 and the region is incorporated into the Aztatlan Mercantile System, so that west Mexican characteristics dominate from CE 950 to 1400. Foster’s discussion of sites, burials, and pottery for
the Preclassic phase through the prehistoric to historic transition is essential to comprehending Durango’s long and complex culture history.

In "Chapter Thirteen: Recent Advances in Chihuahuan Archaeology" (pp. 221-239, 4 figures), Ronna Jane Bradley (University of New Mexico at Valencia) begins with a review of past archaeological investigations and initial interpretations of Chihuahuan prehistory. The modern era of research begins with Charles C. Di Peso’s Joint Casas Grandes Expedition at Paquime and in four other sites that led to the postulate of a six phase Casas Grandes chronology phase from Preclassic through Spanish times. Di Peso argued for a merchant-trader (pochteca) model with Paquime as a trading outpost and craft production center. Bradley uses new dendrochronological (tree ring chronology) data to refine the culture periods and reevaluates Chihuahuan social complexity, craft production systems, and water control systems. She concludes by discussing Paquime’s role in the Aztecan Mercantile System as well as other paradigms: prestige goods exchange, the Mesoamerican world system, and peopling model. Readers will find a different evaluation of Di Peso’s paradigms in Culture and Contact: Charles C. Di Peso’s Gran Chichimeca edited by Anne I. Woosley and John C. Ravensloot (Dragoon, AZ: Amerind Foundation Publication, and Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993). Separate contributions by Carroll Riley, Randall McGuire, Ben Nelson, Phil Weigand, and Linda Cordell are especially illuminating.

With "Chapter Fourteen: The Archaeological Traditions of Sinaloa" (pp. 241-253, 6 figures, 12 endnotes), Maria Elisa Villalpando (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Centro Sonora) examines the cultural history of the Estado de Sonora, which is based heavily upon ceramic data. The lowlands had three cultural traditions: 1) Trincheras (CE 750-1450, concentrated in three river valleys but extending north to the Gulf of California); 2) Huatabampo (which disappears ca. CE 1000, and is associated with a distinctive red pottery in sites long extinct lagoons, estuaries, and river valleys); and 3) Central Coast (viewed as the prehistoric manifestation of the ethnographic Seri). In the uplands, the Casas Grandes tradition is discerned, centered at Paquime, and the Rio Sonora culture in the area between the international border and northern Sinaloa, ending ca. CE 1300. The author emphasizes the sociocultural and economic differences between the lowland and upland cultural traditions, the effect of drought and desertification by mid CE 1400s, and subsequent establishment of the Spanish mission system.

The final essay, "Chapter Fifteen: From Tzintzuntzan to Paquime: Peers or Peripheries in Greater Mesoamerica? " by Michael W. Spence (University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada) a central Mexican specialist who also knows the archaeology of north and west Mexico, summarizes some of the authors’ significant points and arguments. Spence considers the role of Teotihuacan in obsidian control, marine shell exchange, the distribution of talud and tablero architectural traits, the probable Michoacano enclave at the Teotihuacan urban center, and the nature of the Aztlan complex. He evaluates the narrowness of the definition of Mesoamerica, and offers important suggestions for future research, beginning with extensive regional surveys, selected stratigraphic excavations, and technical analyses of artifacts.

This volume is a significant contribution to our understanding of west and northwest Mexico and the relationships with central Mexico, particularly the Basin of Mexico and environs where Precorllic Cuicuilco, Classic period Teotihuacan, and the Postclassic Toltec and Aztec (Mexica) cultures flourished. Foster and Gorenstein have assembled a group of compelling essays derived from the 1992 conference, admirably edited the revised and emended contributions, and presented the reader with a current and salient synthesis of extremely complex areas at the so-called Mesoamerican western and northwestern frontier. The authors make persuasive arguments for the inclusion of parts of west and northwest Mexico in the "Greater Mesoamerican" culture area. While much of the discussion focuses on connections with cultures in the Basin of Mexico, the interrelationships between northwest Mexico and the American Southwest are not adequately discussed.

The peoples of the Central Plateau, west and northwest Mexico, the Valley of Oaxaca, highland Guatemala, the lowlands of the Yucatan Peninsula, and the Mexican Gulf Coast had more culture contact than we have been able to discern archaeologically. Therefore, this book illuminates the fact that Mexican peoples since the Preclassic period have been migrating, communicating, and conducting commerce for a very long time. The volume is comparable in importance to Stark and Arnold’s Olmec to Aztec: Settlement Patterns in the Ancient Gulf Lowlands (1997) [4], and is another example of a regional assessment that is the result of a conference that engages current scholarship and a fine editorial hand. Foster and Gorenstein and their colleagues have provided compelling essays with descriptions, interpretations, and paradigms of trade and center-periphery. There is a great deal yet to learn about west and northwest Mexico, but
these contributions provide a significant baseline for further research in these areas of “Greater Mesoamerica.”

A few minor errors appear in the citations, for example: Federick = Frederick (p. 272) and Glascock = Glasscock (p. 274). The reference to Bell 1971 in Handbook of Middle American Indians should be to Vol. 11 rather than Vol. 10 (p. 265).

Notes


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