Ancient Mesoamerica, **10** (1999), 115
Copyright © 1999 Cambridge University Press. Printed in the U.S.A.

SPECIAL SECTION: THE FORMATIVE MAYA VILLAGE OF K'AXOB

INTRODUCTION

This issue's special section presents three papers with important new data on the Formative-period village of K'axob, Belize. Until very recently, our knowledge of Formative Mesoamerican villages has been heavily weighted toward that of the highlands (Flannery 1976). These papers on K'axob go a long way toward redressing that imbalance.

The first article, by **Ilean Isel Isaza Aizpurúa and Patricia A. McAnany**, offers a detailed description and analysis of the K'axob shell industry. They interpret shell beads and other ornaments not only as items of personal adornment but also as symbols of identity that could also indicate nascent political authority at the family level. In the second paper, **McAnany, Rebecca Storey, and Angela K. Lockard** present an analysis of 103 human burials recovered from 72 burial contexts at K'axob dating from Middle Formative to Early Classic times. The burials show a wide range in variation in terms of position, number of interments within a burial facility, incidence of secondary interments, and accompanying grave goods, allowing important inferences regarding changes in mortuary behavior and ritual. In the third paper, **McAnany and Sandra L. López Varela** describe the Formative-period village setting it in its social and ritual context. Very careful dating, based on 25 radiocarbon AMS assays, indicate a time span of occupation of this part of the site of 800 B.C. to A.D. 125, thus indicating a major occupation dating to the Middle and Late Formative periods. Their reconstruction of the village emphasizes ceramic, architectural, and mortuary data. As they argue, the evidence marshaled in these papers clearly points toward the increasingimportance of an emerging ancestor cult during the Formative period, a theme that McAnany (1995) has elaborated previously.

The wealth of data provided by the K'axob investigations is indeed striking, yet one is still struck by the relative scarcity of information on early occupations in the Maya lowlands compared with what we know of the Classic and even the Postclassic periods in the area. Patricia McAnany and her coauthors provide an exemplary lesson in how to confront this scarcity: careful excavation and analysis of archaeological data, supplemented by ethnohistoric and ethnographic data, combined with wide-ranging, comparative interpretation.

WILLIAM R. FOWLER, JR.

REFERENCES

Flannery, Kent
1976 *The Early Mesoamerican Village*. Academic Press, New York.
McAnany, Patricia A.
1995 *Living with the Ancestors: Kinship and Kingship in Ancient Maya Society*. University of Texas Press, Austin.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0956536199001145 Published online by Cambridge University Press