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SPECIAL SECTION: TAKING STOCK OF BASIN OF MEXICO ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE EARLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, PART 2

INTRODUCTION

This issue's Special Section presents the second group of papers on Basin of Mexico archaeology from the Ometusco Seminar, organized by Larry J. Gorenflo and Ian G. Robertson in 2007 to assess the current state of Basin of Mexico archaeology and to formulate suggestions for future research. The papers cover a wide range of topics and temporal periods and touch on a large number of methodological and theoretical issues. A common thread that runs through all the contributions consists of the authors' critical evaluations of their own and their colleagues' work—assessments of the value and impact of this research, thoughts on how these investigations could have been improved, and recommendations for maximizing the impact and value of future archaeological research in the Basin of Mexico.

A theme underlying these papers is the urgent need to address the destruction of archaeological resources due to runaway population increase and urbanization throughout the basin. The world today is very different from the one in which these investigations were first designed and undertaken in the 1960s. It is an irony of late modern capitalism and globalization that today's archaeologists must be equally—perhaps even more—concerned about contemporary population density and urban expansion as with their studies of these phenomena in the pre-Columbian past. According to Aguilar et al. (2003), population growth in Mexico City and its metropolitan area more than doubled from about 9.5 million in 1970 to 18.9 million in 2000. The dialectic of this demographic growth with local and global economic, social, and political factors is obviously a powerful force affecting finite archaeological resources as well as the praxis of archaeological research.

In addition to the problem of the destruction of archaeological sites, cultural heritage issues are also at stake. The construction of Mexico's national identity through the manipulation of its pre-Columbian past is well-known (Fowler 1987; McGuire 2008: 156–157; Trigger 2006:277–278). As Meskell (2012:231) points out, however, one cannot assume that conscious construction and manipulation are the only rationales in relationships between individuals, groups, regions, nations, and their respective pasts. While a dominant national metanarrative still feeds on monumental discoveries, these relationships now also develop and operate at all political levels and have impacts from the local to the global scale (López Aguilar 2002; Vázquez León 1996). These processes will continue to play an important role in future research.

WILLIAM R. FOWLER

ORGANIZATION OF PAPERS IN THIS SPECIAL SECTION

The following six essays represent the second installment of papers presented at the seminar on Basin of Mexico archaeology held in September 2007 at San Miguel Ometusco, Mexico, a former *hacienda pulquera* in the upper Teotihuacan Valley. This synopsis follows the summary of the first group of essays from the seminar which appeared in the previous issue of *Ancient Mesoamerica* (vol. 26, no. 1). We reiterate some of the basic information on the seminar here to provide context for the following offerings, while referring readers to the overview that accompanied publication of the first collection (Fowler et al. 2015). The latter provides a more complete summary of the seminar and its goals, organization, and participants.

We convened the Ometusco Seminar in response to what we felt was a need to take stock of archaeological research in the Basin of Mexico (Robertson and Gorenflo 2008). Two other such meetings had occurred in the past—the most recent was in 1972 (Wolf 1976), and the seminal overview of basin archaeology had been published (Sanders et al. 1979)—but much time had passed and considerable progress had occurred in Basin of Mexico research. We designed the seminar to address two major goals: (1) to assess the state of basin archaeology in the early twenty-first century; and (2) to chart future archaeological investigations in the region, based on what is known of the subject and rapidly emerging threats on the archaeological record. We invited participants with considerable experience conducting archaeological research in the basin, focusing on individuals who studied a range of key issues. The remaining pages in this issue contain papers written by the following scholars: Martin F. Biskowski (regional pre-Columbian economic development); Thomas H. Charlton, Patricia Fournier, and Cynthia L. Otis Charlton (historical archaeology); Raul García Chávez, Luís Gamboa Cabezas, and Nadia Velez Saldaña (Teotihuacan's rural hinterland in the Basin of Mexico); Sergio Gómez Chávez (management and conservation of Teotihuacan in the context of modern institutions and society); Emily McClung de Tapia (paleoenvironment and paleoecology of the basin); and Deborah L. Nichols (relationship between agricultural development and emerging complex societies in the Basin of Mexico). Sadly, Tom Charlton died prior to completing a written version of his

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presentation, a task skillfully completed by co-authors Fournier and Otis Charlton.

In the first paper, **Emily McLung de Tapia** summarizes the literature on the paleoenvironment of the Basin of Mexico during the Holocene epoch (11,700 B.P.–present). For a region where archaeological understanding over the past several decades has emphasized cultural adaptation to the natural environment, the importance of this type of information cannot be overstated. McLung de Tapia summarizes early pioneering efforts on the paleoenvironment of the basin, begun in the 1940s and 1950s, which provided a basis for cultural ecology studies beginning in the 1960s. Her emphasis on research during the 1980s and beyond identifies important advances. Some relate to improved methods of studying the topic, including developments in the analysis of pollen, phytoliths, limnology, stratigraphy, soils and sediments, tephras, macrobotanical remains, and faunal remains. But McLung de Tapia also discusses the contributions of geoarchaeological studies of the basin over the past two decades. Detailed studies of certain localities revealed valuable insights into the prehistoric environment, providing a basis for piecing together a picture of a natural environment that helped to shape cultural behavior and which, in turn, was shaped by it.

Martin Biskowski's contribution, appearing as the second paper, focuses on prehistoric economy, noting that much of Basin of Mexico archaeology over the past five decades relates to interpretations of prehistoric economy. Biskowski discusses potential future research in light of insights provided by early studies grounded in cultural ecology, as well as more recent efforts to understand basin economy in terms of key resources (for example, obsidian) and attempts to identify roles of different economic units (for example, households) and decision makers (for example, political factions and ethnic groups). Potential new areas of emphasis include geographic information system-based studies of prehistoric economy, complexity theory, World Systems Theory, and studies of biodiversity, sustainability, and long-term agrarian development. In his summary of current knowledge of the prehistoric economy in the region, Biskowski seeks to identify unanswered questions in several periods of prehistoric occupation, from Archaic through Classic (Teotihuacan) periods. With an admitted focus on issues of his own interest—the subsistence economy—he highlights a concern shared by many researchers and that relates to a rapidly disappearing archaeological record: the need to base new studies of prehistoric economy in the region on data collected in the past.

The third paper, by **Deborah Nichols**, examines the relationship between the emergence of intensive agriculture and complex societies in the Basin of Mexico, emphasizing the Formative occupation of the region. Beginning with a review of theoretical perspectives on the role of agriculture in sociocultural evolution, Nichols notes that many of the most important developments on this topic are based on archaeological research in the basin, from early statements of materialism and cultural ecology to more nuanced ideas about bottom-up management of crop production and key resources, such as water, to reduce risk. Nichols then traces important changes associated with the transition from foraging to crop production, and subsequently associated with increasingly intensive agriculture that emerged from Early Formative through Terminal Formative periods. Nichols reflects on how ideas and theories about the evolution of complex societies in the Basin of Mexico exceed our ability to test them adequately with available data, suggesting avenues for further research to improve our ability to understand the relationship between intensive agriculture and sociocultural evolution.

The fourth paper, by **Raúl Chávez García, Luís Gamboa Cabezas**, and **Nadia Velez Saldaña**, uses information drawn mostly from recent *rescate* (rescue or salvage) excavations to shed light on Teotihuacan's relationship with contemporaneous, smaller settlements in other parts of the Basin of Mexico. One of the most important messages in this essay is the role of salvage archaeology as a legitimate source of understanding in the region. Rapidly disappearing under the onslaught of modern urban expansion, relevant sites suggest considerable variation both in the resources extracted for consumption by residents of Teotihuacan, as well as in the nature of the sociopolitical dynamics that linked the capital to these smaller satellite settlements. Such research makes key contributions to our understanding of how other portions of the Basin of Mexico helped provision the large urban center, and how economic contributions varied. Interestingly, a number of (mostly smaller) settlements appear to have been abandoned around the end of the Tlamimilolpa phase, possibly a response to ecological disruptions associated with eruption of the volcano Xitle in the southwestern part of the basin, raising important economic as well as demographic questions.

Sergio Gómez Chávez's paper, the fifth in this Special Section, draws on years of research experience at Teotihuacan to consider the ancient city's status as a unique archaeological resource and a place of vital cultural patrimony in light of continuing destruction of the archaeological record. A UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) World Heritage site since 1987, Teotihuacan has reached what Gómez describes as a state of crisis, one in which government policies and institutions have failed to protect remains of the prehistoric city from the encroachment of modern urban sprawl and from the destruction of exposed architectural and artistic remains through natural forces of erosion and decay. The reasons for this failure are complex as modern efforts to improve the well-being of modern communities conflict with the need to protect this enormous, unique archeological site. Gómez is pessimistic about any solutions to maintain the archaeological record at Teotihuacan that do not simultaneously address a combination of interwoven economic, social, and political factors.

Finally, the sixth paper, by **Thomas Charlton, Patricia Fournier**, and **Cynthia Otis Charlton**, examines historical archaeology in the Basin of Mexico, in this case involving investigations of archaeological remains dating to the Spanish Conquest and later. The authors discuss prior studies that integrate historical, ethnohistoric, cultural geographic, and archaeological research. They also discuss opportunistic research in the form of salvage archaeology, and regional research in portions of the Basin of Mexico (the Teotihuacan Valley) and areas immediately to its north (the Mezquital Valley), which account for much of the historical archaeology fieldwork in the region over the past four decades. Charlton and colleagues summarize substantive issues related to material culture as well as architecture, Hispanic institutions, and settlement patterns, all of which remain accessible to varying degrees to historical archaeological research in the region. They call for greater development of theoretical perspectives to guide future research, augmenting the largely descriptive results of salvage archaeology with investigations of demographics, economy, ethnicity, and class, in an attempt to understand this dynamic period in the region's past.

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