
SPECIAL SECTION: RECENT CHRONOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN NORTHERN YUCATAN

INTRODUCTION

The inspiration for this special section came from a series of round table discussions held in the field at a beautiful colonial hotel. These conversations naturally evolved from reports on excavation progress to deeper examinations of the history of the northern Maya lowlands. A consensus emerged that the progress of archaeology in the north has suffered greatly from the lack of a standard chronology, resulting in confusion and disagreement over the timing of crucial events and processes in the past. What one specialist might call Early Postclassic, another might consider Terminal Classic, or what one might refer to as Middle Classic, another might think of as late Early Classic, and so on. Much of this confusion arises from the disparate terminology in the literature. More fundamental confusion arises from the differences in timing between events in the northern and southern lowlands. Early scholars working in Yucatan assumed that similar processes were at work simultaneously throughout the Maya region and attempted to project the well-documented southern chronology onto the north. More recently, specialists have attempted to modify the southern chronology to make it fit the northern one. In both cases, nuances of the development of Maya culture within the northern lowlands were lost. Another complicating factor has been the lack of penetrating stratigraphic excavations, thus hampering the understanding of earlier periods. The abundant architectural remains of later periods have always created a bias toward the last few centuries before the Conquest. Nonetheless, even with respect to the later periods, architectural and ceramic sequences remain somewhat uncertain.

The authors who contributed to this Special Section share the view that the refinement of chronology represents a critical goal in the archaeology of northern Yucatan and a necessary correlate of more theoretically oriented research. Consider the prime example of Chichen Itza. Almost 65 years have passed since the Carnegie Institution of Washington began its flagship project at Chichen Itza with a very explicit cultural-historical focus, but we still lack a comprehensive historical understanding of this great pre-Columbian city. This is but one example of the work that remains to be done in the northern Maya lowlands, and it highlights the difficulties in tracing ancient economic, social and political processes in the area

in the absence of a solid chronological framework. The implications of this go well beyond the concerns of regional chronology. The well-documented cosmopolitan nature of Chichen Itza derived from its interactions beyond the northern lowlands, its development, and the development of other centers in the immediate area occurred as a part of broader cultural processes in greater Mesoamerica, but few of these interactions have been securely placed in time.

The papers presented in this section represent great strides forward in providing much of the missing chronological structure for northern Yucatan. In the first paper, **George J. Bey III, Tara M. Bond, William M. Ringle, Craig A. Hanson, Charles W. Houck, and Carlos Peraza Lope** offer a detailed, comprehensive overview of the ceramic sequence of Ek Balam, which serves as an introduction to the entire history of the northern Maya lowlands. In the next paper, **Susan Kepecs** presents her analysis of the ceramics of the Chikinchel region on the northeastern tip of Yucatan, followed by **Michael P. Smyth** who offers a view of his chronological research at the aptly named site of Chac II in the Puuc zone. In the fourth paper, **Patricia K. Anderson** presents convincing data for the Terminal Classic dating of Yula, which has resounding implications for the dating of nearby Chichen Itza. Finally, **Charles Suhler, Traci Ardren, and David Johnstone** provide the first summary of stratigraphic and ceramic data for the site of Yaxuna and integrate this information into the overall history of the region.

The papers presented in this special section represent a serious effort to advance the work of refining the regional chronology of the northern Maya lowlands, although we are certain these contributors would admit that much more work remains to be done. The quality of data they present, especially new ceramic data from sealed contexts, ensures that these papers will be of scholarly interest to all Mesoamericanists.

TRACI ARDREN
WILLIAM R. FOWLER, JR.