

Foreword

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The University at Albany SUNY's Institute for Mesoamerican Studies (IMS) is pleased to welcome this book to its series in collaboration with the University Press of Colorado. Founded in 1975, IMS has supported the research activities of several generations of Mesoamerican faculty and graduate student scholars of the Department of Anthropology at University at Albany, and it has served the broader academic community through its book publications.

The present volume, *Pre-Mamom Pottery Variation and the Preclassic Origins of the Lowland Maya*, represents the newest contribution to IMS's Studies on Culture and Society Series. This book's editor, Debra Walker, is one of the foremost ceramic analysis experts for the Maya region, and she has directed and collaborated on research at sites dating to the Preclassic, Classic, and Postclassic periods—from around 1000 BCE to 1500 CE in the Maya area.

One of the most pressing questions about Maya society is its origins as pottery-using, agriculturalist people, and in recent years archaeologists have successfully located and investigated the earliest deposits that yield features and artifact assemblages reflecting the settlement patterns and social organization

of the earliest villagers. This volume brings together contributions by authors who are the foremost authorities in the origins of Maya society and the diagnostic pottery complexes that mark this cultural coalescence. The chapters offer perspectives from broad geographic localities in the northern and southern lowlands and from the Caribbean, Gulf, and Pacific coastal regions. Together they represent a comparative anthropological body of work that recognizes similarities across these areas through time as well as distinctive characteristics more constrained in their distribution.

Archaeological research focusing on the Maya past is periodically transformed by breakthroughs in understanding sociocultural phenomena of this enduring culture, with its millions of descendant people alive today who participate actively in global economies and multicultural discourse of the modern world. This book captures such a moment in recognizing the prevalence and importance of early agriculturalist peoples and the pottery that fixes their appearance chronologically on the landscape. For many years, the quality and quantity of evidence regarding the first Maya area peoples was doubted and debated, and in this book we witness a convergence of decades of research, although not a consensus, given variation in regional patterns. While by 600 BCE, “Mamom” pottery-using people widely exhibited recognizably Maya cultural features and organization, this book delves into the fascinating 400-year period prior to that date, which was rife with experimentation, innovation, and interaction representing the very processes of the origins of complex society. This book will serve as a launching point for all future inquiries into Maya origins.