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Maya *patolli* was more of a ritual affair played on graffiti-style boards that were restricted to private elite precincts and temples. However, they argue that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, and do not rule out the possibility that portable *patolli* boards may have been widely used across the Maya region. Future household and settlement research may yet provide evidence for *patolli* in non-elite settings.

Chapters on Mesoamerica also focus on other forms of play that are seldom discussed by archaeologists in depth. One of the most stimulating case studies in the book is a quantitative examination of Formative Period (~1,600–500 B.C.) figurines from Chalcatzingo, Mexico by Mark Harlan (Chapter 11). While some Mesoamerican archaeologists have traditionally considered figurines to be ritually significant “cult” items, Harlan’s analysis of morphological characteristics across a large sample of figurines provides convincing support for an alternative hypothesis that these artifacts were children’s playthings and essential for learning social cues. One of my favorite chapters was Gerardo Gutiérrez’s discussion of Mesoamerican acrobatics (Chapter 14). His dynamic discussion ranges from the Formative through Colonial periods across Mesoamerica to paint a vivid picture of elite rituals and community festivals, emphasizing the “ritual merriment” of entertainment. I was particularly struck at the wonderment that must have been felt at festivals and fairs when witnessing feats of balance and strength, including tightrope walking, stilt dancing, and

palo valador, a 17 m.-high post from which acrobats flew on ropes.

While the volume covers a remarkable array of prehistoric North American games, Warren de Boer concludes by highlighting some common themes shared by the case studies. First, much of what we know about ancient games, based on ethnohistoric data, suggests that they had set rules that were important for how they impacted other sectors of society. A standard lexicon of rules often resulted in standardization in gaming pieces, boards, and other paraphernalia, and this is how we identify them in the archaeological record. Second, the rules of games were (and still are) often bent and broken to serve the needs of a particular player or team. An enhanced understanding of the dynamics of prehistoric games will inform broader anthropological and archaeological questions about status, division of labor, economy, and community in prehistory. *Prehistoric Games of North American Indians* makes a significant advance in this direction, and is sure to have great influence on future archaeological interpretations of prehistoric games in North America and elsewhere in the ancient world.

REFERENCE

- Culin, Stewart
1907 *Fourth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology: Games of North American Indians*. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.



Regional Settlement Demography in Archaeology

Robert D. Drennan, C. Adam Berrey,
and Christian E. Peterson,
Clinton Corners, NY: Eliot Werner Publications, 2015,
200 pp., ISBN 9780989824941, \$32.95 (paper).

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This book broadly introduces settlement demography, with selected examples from around the world of how it

can be applied. Despite the importance of demographic work, this book only has the space to cover the basics of why it is important to archaeologists and how the work can be applied. It is, obviously, limited to the settlement demography of “settlements.” It does not look at the demographics of mobile hunter/gatherer societies (although it suggests that bioarchaeology can address some of these questions). Instead, it focuses on sedentary societies and is directed at non-demographically specialized archaeologists. While I consider this book a “must read” for all archaeologists, it is not an in-depth

analysis of the methods of settlement demography, nor is it a handbook for how we should conduct our field research. However, it is a wonderful introduction to the world of demography, and it should be highly considered by those working in archaeology, particularly those that focus on group interactions and settlement distributions on a regional scale.

The major topics within settlement demography are divided among five chapters, each with a different focus. The first chapter sets up the book, with a “Why Bother?” discussion. For years, settlement demography has not received the support that the authors (or I) think it deserves. The authors argue that much, but obviously not all, of archaeological research is demographic in nature. Archaeologists commonly seek to estimate population size, seasonality of occupation, migration, or religious, economic, and social ties between sites. When we limit this work to archaeological methods and do not utilize the toolset of statistical analysis that goes along with settlement demography, we are missing out on some important data. This book attempts to explain the extent of what demography has to offer to archaeologists who work in these fields.

After an explanation of why we should bother with settlement demography, the authors walk us through four chapters that offer an overview of how demographic techniques can be applied to our data sets and what questions can reasonably be answered with these techniques. They use examples from three sites that the authors are familiar with to show how the techniques work. Chapter 2 covers what can be used as population proxies, since an exact population count is not achievable. Even among living groups, it is rarely possible to account for every person in a population or within a given region. When studying past societies, we do not have the option

of surveying people. Instead we must rely on indirect evidence about the people who lived in a given region. Population proxies include numbers of dwellings and the area and population density of sites.

In Chapter 3, we are shown what can be done using population proxies. Without absolute numbers, two settlements can be compared (e.g., A is larger than B, or even A is four times larger than B), but we cannot know that settlement A had 487 occupants while settlement B had 124 occupants. If we want to be more specific in our analyses, Chapter 4 describes how to estimate absolute numbers of inhabitants. Depending on the types of data we have, we can attain estimates of the number of people present. However, the authors repeatedly caution that any researcher that provides a population estimate involving an exact number is likely overly trusting their methods. Most population estimates should instead propose a population range. Finally, in Chapter 5 we are provided a plan by which to collect regional settlement data for demographic analysis. Here, we are taken back to the basics of survey to understand how data collection techniques best serve demographic purposes. These methods are not meant to be burdensome to archaeologists, but instead are designed to show how more thorough surveys can answer demographic and archaeological questions.

This book is addressed to the average archaeologist, and it reminds both beginners and experienced scholars alike that while they may not think of demography as being a crucial part of their research, its methods can expand what we already know about populations. For some, demography may only play a small role in their research, but the authors (and I) hope that after reading this book, demography will play a greater role in the planning and implementation of future archaeological projects so we can utilize all tools at our disposal.

