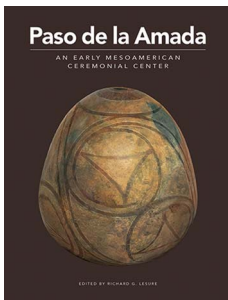


As the book received only a limited print run, the publication can be read and downloaded through the OAPEN foundation's website, and I encourage the interested reader to do so.

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RICHARD G. LESURE (ed). 2021. *Paso de la Amada: an early Mesoamerican ceremonial center*. Los Angeles (CA): Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press; 978-1-950446-15-5 hardback \$125.



This substantial tome expertly reports the excavations, artefact analysis and interpretations of early human lifeways at one of the first Mesoamerican ceremonial centres, dating to around 1900–1300 BC. The authors demonstrate that Paso de la Amada (an intriguing site name meaning ‘path of the beloved’), located near the Pacific Coast of Chiapas, Mexico, was indeed a ceremonial centre due to its sizeable plaza and early ballcourt, in addition to ritual alignments among its many artificial mounds and ponds. However, no ritual structures or stone monuments, nor extensive ceremonial artefact deposits, were found by the investigators. The results of several field seasons are reported here, but the book does not report all excavations and artefact studies undertaken at Paso de la Amada. Highlights of the volume include detailed artefact analysis, high-quality object and excavation photos published in colour, numerous useful drawings and charts, and the interpretations for understanding society across the site's occupation. The contributors to the volume state that one main goal of the project was to reconstruct the diachronic development of social inequality through the association of material culture with buildings of different sizes and configurations. Although they indicate that their results are mixed due to uneven chronological and artefactual findings, the contributors report some excellent data and interpretations regarding their goal of understanding the rise of Mesoamerican status inequalities.

The first seven chapters of this large monograph provide overviews of the site and its earthen architecture, while describing the excavations of specific mounds and areas. This offers the reader a clear picture of the site's landscape, how the authors conducted excavations, and what was found in the mounds. The contributors describe the layout of Paso de la Amada across the occupation sequence and delineate the construction episodes of a few of the main dispersed mounds. The text explores select multi-family houses and the residence of a chief, or leader, along with their associated artefacts and human burials. The excavators meticulously investigated and recorded building layers, pits, activity areas and post holes, together with their associated finds. The archaeological descriptions

are thorough and clear. Notably, the site's inhabitants appear to have abandoned Paso de la Amada when the increasing economic, political and ritual successes of a nearby centre with connections to Olmec civilisation attracted regional populations.

The largest number of chapters—17 in total—discuss the artefacts and human burials. The authors describe fully the objects and human skeletons, their contexts, and their importance for understanding life at an early Mesoamerican centre, and how it changed over time. These chapters are supported by photographs, drawings, charts and figures to help the reader understand the results and their significance. This section of the volume details pottery, which is among the earliest in the New World, ground-stone tools, chipped-stone artefacts (including imported obsidian), faunal remains, objects made of bone, and ceramic figurines. Surprisingly, archaeobotanical remains did not preserve well in the soil and ecological conditions at Paso de la Amada, although animal bones, including bones of smaller freshwater fish, did. Unexpected, too, are the rather even distributions of animal resources between elite and non-elite households.

The chapter on pottery provides nuanced descriptions of the different wares. I particularly liked that the authors discussed pottery forms and functions, instead of just decoration, manufacture and archaeological distribution. Some additional discussion of pottery temper by group or period, which is important for comprehending function, would have been welcome. Chili pepper residues were discovered on many pottery fragments, but other residues, such as cacao and maize, were not detected. The chapter on ground stone champions the evidence that maize cultivation became important at the beginning of the occupational sequence at Paso de la Amada and not later, as is the case at other early Mesoamerican sites. In the chapter on obsidian, the distributional evidence across contexts points to redistribution of these exotic artefacts by chiefs.

The chapters towards the end of the book elegantly summarise project findings with regards to social inequality, the initial importance of maize cultivation, early sedentary lifeways and the establishment of Mesoamerican civilisation at Paso de la Amada. The contributors discuss the results of their analysis while also examining their residential group aggrandisers and the subsequent 'rise of chiefs' model. Buildings of greater size and height indicated occupants of elite status and residential group leaders at the site, which was matched by the larger percentages of associated ritual objects, such as stone spheres, pottery censers, divination objects, and body ornaments, including bone rings (especially in more recent excavation levels). The authors found no significant diachronic differences in elite *vs* non-elite pottery vessel types, ceramic figurines, greenstone artefacts, or ground-stone tools across contexts. Elites did, however, have access to larger quantities of obsidian tools. The implications of the study demonstrate the importance not only of economic factors involved in the redistribution of goods in the development of chiefdoms here, but also of a focus on ritual life, religion and power.

I enjoyed reading this book because of its clear prose and well-organised chapters with their significance for understanding the development of Mesoamerican civilisation. I appreciated the addition of frequent interpretations of human behaviour over time at Paso de la Amada, since it is important to learn about the complexity of past societies rather than focusing only on economics, material descriptions and statistics. Many excellent illustrations are often necessary in

archaeological publications and this volume does not disappoint in this respect. I found no shortcomings in the manuscript, nor in the research it reported. The bibliography was slight compared with the total page number, but it is up-to-date and relevant to the volume's content. The book will be most useful for those researching early Mesoamerican societies, and more generally as a model for archaeologists seeking professional ways of presenting site reports and analysis.

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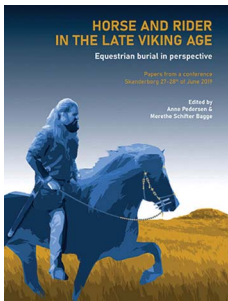
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ANNE PEDERSEN & MERETHE SCHIFTER BAGGE (ed.). 2021. *Horse and rider in the late Viking Age: equestrian burial in perspective. Papers from a conference, Skanderborg 27–28th of June 2019*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press; 978-87-7184-998-1 paperback 349.95 kr.



In 2012, an archaeological survey was undertaken prior to a residential development at Fregerslev, East Jutland, Denmark. As archaeologists worked to excavate a Viking-Age burial ground, including two inhumations, parts of a “richly decorated horse harness were found lying immediately below the topsoil in the outline of a large feature cut into the subsoil” (p. 9). This was suspected to be a chamber burial measuring some 10m²—a huge and potentially very significant burial, as no equestrian burials had been excavated in Denmark since 1983. Investigations in 2016 revealed that the find was in danger of further degradation. Highly acidic soil resulted in nearly all

organic matter in this relatively shallow burial being eaten away, and thus conventional methods of excavation were inappropriate. The burial was excavated in 2017, with large blocks of earth within the burial chamber being stabilised and lifted for micro-excitation and investigation in the laboratory—a process that is still ongoing (Sulas *et al.* 2022).

The volume under review reports preliminary results and background information that represent a highly collaborative and interdisciplinary effort to understand the burial and situate it within regional and wider Eurasian contexts. The book is generously and beautifully illustrated, encouraging wide engagement with all aspects of the material, and is supported by the project website (<http://www.vikingfregerslev.dk/>). It provides an excellent literature review and deep subject knowledge concerning horses in burials in Denmark and other areas. The global context of horses in burials is widened by Karo's Slovenian study and Daim's study on Eurasian equestrianism.

I will share here some aspects of the volume which most interested me. Scientific methods used to approach the evidence of Fregerslev are clearly explained and provide fulsome assessment of the advantages and limitations of *in situ* and *ex situ* methods. “Although time-