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COMMENTS

Comments on the Presentation of Data in Archaeological Monographs

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In his review of Margaret Lyneis's "The Main Ridge Community at Lost City," David Madsen (JCGBA 14[2]:271-273) commends the author for her scholarship and the University of Utah Press for its production standards. He finds fault with the presentation of tables on a disk formatted for Macintosh. We agree on all points.

As members of the Advisory Board for the University of Utah Anthropological Papers (UUAP), our role is to read manuscripts submitted to this series, select appropriate reviewers, evaluate their comments and make recommendations to the Press regarding publication. This task is complicated by the widely encountered archaeological penchant for counting and measuring old stuff with ever greater precision along more and more dimensions, and reporting the results in manuscripts of increasingly greater length. It is now often the case that large parts of works submitted to the Press for consideration as possible UUAPs are made up of "raw" (that is to say, tabulated but conceptually undigested) data, included simply because they were recorded and thus "an essential part of any full and complete report," yet at best only marginally related to any substantive argument, real or reasonably anticipated. Being prepared to indulge this penchant, partly as a matter of professional courtesy, partly because we cannot claim perfect knowledge as to their potential relevance, we suggested some time ago that the

Press investigate alternative methods for publishing some of these data. Though Lyneis's manuscript *did not by any means* fit the profile of an egregiously data-heavy contribution, it did provide an immediate opportunity to experiment with different methods of presentation. We recommended that the Press proceed accordingly.

Our effort could have been more effective. We failed to: (1) track the progress of the Press in investigating alternative methods; (2) advise them about which monographs or portions of monographs could appropriately be presented on something other than hard copy; (3) argue for the judicious use of figures rather than tables; and (4) provide timely and constructive advice about the suitability of alternative methods of presentation. We accept the blame for this lack of communication and its result.

But the underlying problem is still with us: the series cannot publish in hard copy everything investigators define as "data." The cost is simply too great. If UUAP is to maintain its historic role as an outlet for regional research, it has only two options in this matter:

(1) Restrict "data" content to the minimum needed to insure basic comprehension. This is actually what the series has done since its inception. Such a strategy keeps production costs down but limits readers' ability to repeat, let alone reconsider, any but the simplest analyses. Serious investigators have always found this frustrating. The difference is that nowadays authors can often provide comprehensive machine-readable data sets on short notice. We could encourage this and do nothing else. In some cases, it may be the most appropriate solution.

(2) Publish minimum "data" in the actual monograph but make additional information

available in highly compressed format—if not diskette then perhaps microfiche. This moves the series closer to its oft repeated, but seldom achieved, goal of reporting the results of research—particularly archaeological research—“in full.” It will raise costs but probably not greatly. The interesting question begged by this approach is whether general distribution of comprehensive data sets is as necessary as members of the profession so often tell each other it is.

We repeat: the UUAP series cannot publish in hard copy everything that authors define as data. On at least four occasions over the last five years, we have been approached with projects that the authors envisioned publishing as multiple volume sets. Depending on the negotiated schedule, *each project* would have tied up the series for periods of two to five years! Welcome as these submissions would have been (and indeed might still be), in no case was it clear that they justified such a preemptive investment of resources. Authors must exercise editorial judgment and restraint in these matters. Either they submit manuscripts of a size the Press can handle on a reasonable schedule and make raw data available in other media on request, or they anticipate publication of parts of their work in other formats, some of which will inevitably engender the problems of the sort detailed in Madsen’s review.

We are open to further discussion on this matter. Meanwhile, we have sent Madsen a free replacement of his badly abused copy of Lyneis’s excellent monograph.



Further Comments on Publishing Large Compilations of Archaeological Data

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As members of the advisory board of the *University of Utah Anthropological Papers*, Duncan Metcalfe and James O’Connell point out that the University of Utah Press cannot afford to publish the reams of data that accompany some submissions of monograph-length reports, even though the stated goal of the series is to publish research “in full.” Recognizing the value of making data available to interested researchers, they offer two solutions: (1) publish only those data “needed to insure basic comprehension” and encourage authors to make the complete data available for the asking in machine-readable form, or (2) publish the data in a “highly compressed format” with the paper. These two proposals do not limit the possibilities, and I offer here a third.

It seems to me that most archaeologists have not considered seriously the role that collections repositories can play in making more than just collections available for research. Every archaeologist recognizes that artifact catalogs and various field documents should accompany a collection submitted to a repository. In addition, a collections repository is in a position to house many other forms of information associated with collections and to provide this information for the cost of duplication. When an archaeologist writes a monograph, or any other form of publication for that matter, he or she might consider providing data compilations to the same repository housing the collections from which the data were derived, and simply report in the publication the availability of the data at the repository.

I agree with Metcalfe and O’Connell’s position that presentation of data in publications should be abstracted and should be directly related to a specific argument or conclusion. Indeed, devising concise and meaningful presentations of data requires a good deal of skill, and perhaps we who teach at universities and colleges do not place enough emphasis on the development of these skills. A survey of dissertations in archaeology would support this