



Memorial: María del Pilar Luna Erreguerena (1944–2020)

Toni L. Carrell • Margaret Leshikar-Denton •
Dolores Elkin • Roberto Junco

Accepted: 27 August 2020 / Published online: 28 September 2020
© Society for Historical Archaeology 2020

Traveler, There Is No Road

Traveler, your footprints
are the only road, nothing else.

Traveler, there is no road;
you make your own path as you walk.

As you walk, you make your own road,
and when you look back
you see the path
you will never travel again.

Traveler, there is no road;
only a ship's wake on the sea. (Machado 2007)



Fig. 1 María del Pilar Luna Erreguerena, 2011.

This 1912 poem by Antonio Machado, more than anything else, epitomizes the spirit and incredible life's journey traveled by Pilar Luna (Fig. 1). This excerpt from a longer poem was one of her favorites, and when there were choices to be made or paths to choose, she always chose her own.

T. L. Carrell (✉)
Ships of Discovery, 39 Condesa Road, Santa Fe, NM 87508,
U.S.A.
e-mail: tlcarrrell@shipsofdiscovery.org

M. Leshikar-Denton
Cayman Islands National Museum, PO Box 30702, Grand
Cayman KY 1-1203, Cayman Islands

D. Elkin
Instituto Nacional de Antropología y Pensamiento
Latinoamericano, 3 de Febrero, 1378-1426 Buenos Aires,
Argentina

R. Junco
Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Moneda 16, Col.
Centro Cuahatemoc, 06000 Mexico City, CP, Mexico

Early Years

Pilar was a native of Tampico, Mexico, and was the youngest of five children. Born to Spanish parents, she was baptized in the Cathedral of Tampico between the Mexican and Spanish flags on the anniversary of Columbus's arrival in the New World. Perhaps reflecting the blending of her family's roots spanning the Old and New worlds, Pilar studied languages and



Fig. 2 Pilar Luna at the January 1979 Laguna de Media Luna fieldwork exercise during the first underwater archaeology class held in Mexico. (Photo by Donald H. Keith, 1979.)

general culture at the Stella Viae School in Rome, Italy, and was fluent in Spanish, English, French, and Italian.

Indeed, Pilar may have been destined to become an underwater archaeologist. She was born with a love of the sea. In her youth she loved to swim for hours just for the pleasure of it. In her early 20s she was the first person in Mexico to teach children with Down's syndrome how to swim. In 1975 she won two championships in underwater navigation and two gold and four silver medals in an underwater techniques competition.

Although they did not always understand her passion, her family members faithfully encouraged her studies and supported her decision to pursue archaeology. As a student at the National School of Anthropology and History in the early 1970s, Pilar took an interest in underwater archaeology, realizing that Mexico has a tremendous variety and wealth of such sites, from cenotes with Maya ceremonial sites to shipwrecks off Mexico's coasts. She obtained her bachelor's degree in archaeology from the National School of Anthropology and History in 1975. That same year, she participated in her first underwater archaeology project at Chunyaxché Lagoon, Quintana Roo, Mexico, with Dr. Harold Edgerton under the direction of Dr. Nancy Farris. This early experience and her love of the sea set her lifelong path.

Pilar returned to terrestrial work, and, in 1978, while a young professional working on the excavations in the Templo Mayor of the former Aztec city of Tenochtitlán in downtown Mexico City, she made a unique discovery, unearthing an enormous pink and gray andesite (a volcanic stone) conch shell carved in precise detail

without the use of metal tools. The artifact is so unique and rare that in 1980 it became the central piece of the first exhibit of pre-Columbian art held in the National Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico City. Today it is prominently displayed at the Templo Mayor Museum and was featured on the 10,000-peso bill.

Underwater Archaeology in Mexico

In 1978, Pilar convinced the authorities at the National School of Anthropology and History to sponsor a series of lectures on and exercises in underwater archaeology. In the words of Donald Keith: "During this class we discussed how to grow underwater archaeology in México, which we quickly perceived was more than Pilar's professional ambition, it was her passion" (Leshikar-Denton and Carrell 2011:2) (Fig. 2).

In 1979, Pilar traveled to Turkey to gain field experience with the Institute of Nautical Archaeology under George Bass, working on two ancient shipwrecks from the Hellenistic and Byzantine periods at Serçe Limani. It was a life-changing experience. She emerged from this experience even more committed to the cause of underwater archaeology in Mexico.

Long before traveling to Turkey, Pilar and three students prepared a proposal to create a program dedicated to underwater archaeology and presented it to the general director of Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH). Historian Flor Trejo called this the "foundational document" of the program (Leshikar-Denton and Carrell 2011:3). Pilar labored unrelentingly to get a formal program established, often vigorously opposed, criticized, and even threatened by treasure hunters, bureaucrats, prejudiced scholars, and navy officers. She had to win over scores of officials in Mexico's sprawling bureaucracy, ranging from oceanographers to admirals in the navy. It took Pilar eight years of passionate lobbying to convince INAH to create the Department of Underwater Archaeology, of which she was appointed director in 1980.

INAH's Department of Underwater Archaeology

Pilar wasted no time in getting involved in numerous projects. Among the first were surveys and test excavations of 16th- and 18th-century shipwrecks on Cayo Nuevo Reef (Fig. 3) in the Bay of Campeche (1979–1983), surveys in Media Luna Spring (1981–1982), test

Fig. 3 Pilar Luna briefing PEMEX saturation divers aboard the diving vessel *Mercurio del Golfo* at Cayo Nuevo during the November 1979 recovery of the 16th-century bronze cannon. (Photo by Donald H. Keith, 1979.)



excavation of an early 16th-century shipwreck site in Bahía Mujeres (1983–1984, 1990), and the survey of Chinchorro Reef (1984). Of that first project on Cayo Nuevo Reef, Donald Keith remarked:

It could be argued that Mexican underwater archaeology was born during that first expedition to Cayo Nuevo in late November 1979. Far from the classroom, it was not a simple, safe, learning exercise. It is just as well that we did not know the Bay of Campeche is not a good place to be in winter. Pilar saw recovery of the bronze cannon as an opportunity to draw attention to her efforts to jump-start underwater archaeology in México, and was willing to lay everything on the line to stage a high-profile raid on Davy Jones' locker. It was the first of what eventually became three expeditions to Cayo Nuevo and the crucible in which Pilar's mettle was tested. For that matter, we were all tested—but Pilar had the most at stake. A lot of important people were looking over her shoulder. (Leshikar-Denton and Carrell 2011:3)

In addition to projects in Mexico, Pilar worked internationally, in the Cayman Islands with Roger C. Smith (1980), in Jamaica with Donny L. Hamilton (1983), and with Donald Keith in the Bahamas (1986) (Fig. 4) and Panama (1990).

In 1982 in the midst of these accomplishments, Pilar presented her master's thesis, entitled "Underwater

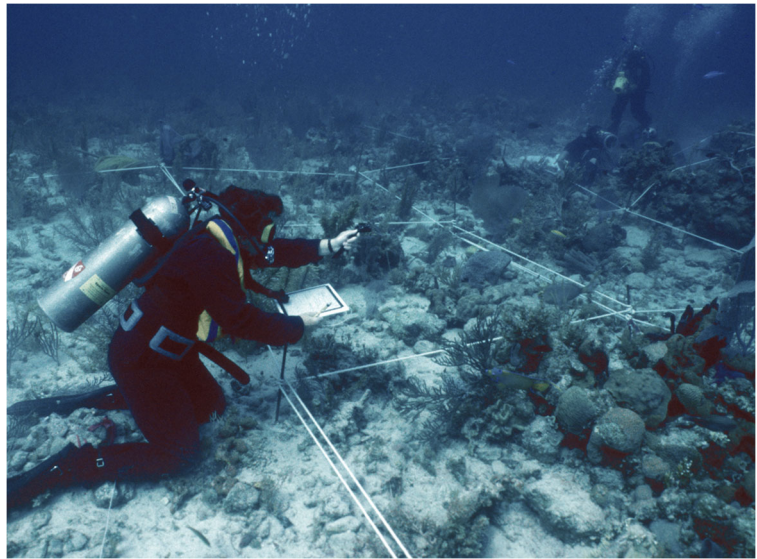
Archaeology," which was accepted cum laude and recommended for publication.

Never one to sit on her laurels, Pilar understood that, to ensure the future of underwater archaeology in Mexico, she needed to train Mexican students and engage other professionals in related fields. In 1994, Pilar engineered an intensive course at the master's level in underwater archaeology offered through the National School of Anthropology and History and open only to applicants already holding or nearing degrees in archaeology or conservation. She invited colleagues Donald Keith, Jack Hunter, and Monica S. Hunter from the U.S. and Steve Willis from Canada to teach and provide their insights into the practice of underwater archaeology. The first of its kind in Mexico, the course was a tremendous success, and, as a result, Pilar's department was upgraded within INAH to become the Underwater Archaeology Vice-Directorate in 1995.

INAH's Underwater Archaeology Vice-Directorate

Soon after the elevation to vice-directorate in 1995, three major research projects were started: the 1630–1631 New Spain Fleet Research Project, the inventory and analysis of submerged cultural resources in the Gulf of Mexico, and the Underwater Archaeological Atlas for the recording, studying, and protecting of cenotes on the Yucatán Peninsula. Other projects that followed included researching the wreck site of a Manila galleon in Baja California, surveys of two lagoons in the crater of the

Fig. 4 Pilar Luna checking the grid orientation during the September 1986 Highborne Cay Wreck test excavation, Bahamas. (Photo by K. C. Smith, 1986.)



Nevado de Toluca volcano, and the surveying of underwater cultural heritage at the Banco Chinchorro Biosphere Reserve in Quintana Roo and seeking its nomination as a World Heritage Site on the basis of natural and cultural criteria.

In 2003, the Underwater Archaeology Vice-Directorate initiated five special programs: (1) attention to public reports of cultural material findings, (2) dissemination of information about underwater cultural heritage, (3) training, (4) conservation of archaeological material recovered from submerged sites, and (5) agreements for national and international collaboration.

More recently, the landmark Hoyo Negro Project on the Yucatán Peninsula excited Pilar. A Paleoindian site inside a sinkhole, Hoyo Negro is a treasure trove of Pleistocene fauna. Pilar was especially fond of Naia, the remains of a woman who lived 13,000 years ago and is one of the oldest, most complete skeletons in the Americas. Perhaps it is fitting that a woman from Mexico has once again excited the imagination and is furthering underwater archaeology. The work stemming from this project is a model of collaborative research and international recognition.

Training the Next Generation

Pilar's ongoing commitment to training Mexican underwater archaeologists has been evident throughout her career. Every year she invited renowned specialists from

different parts of the world to give minicourses and share their knowledge and experience with Mexican underwater archaeologists as well as conservators, biologists, historians, students, divers, and fishermen, among others. Chris Amer, former State Underwater Archaeologist of South Carolina, observed that "Pilar has been instrumental in bridging the gulf between professionals and watermen by engaging them in the process of discovery, identification and registration of shipwrecks and other submerged cultural resources" (Leshikar-Denton and Carrell 2011:3).

A third course in underwater archaeology, "Research and Management in Underwater and Maritime Archaeology," took place in Campeche from 27 September to 8 October 2010. Sponsored by UNESCO and INAH, 20 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean were invited to send participants. Of these, 14 countries sent 27 professionals from the fields of archaeology, anthropology, law, conservation, and cultural resource management, and undergraduate students in archaeology and conservation. One of the important outcomes was the creation of a region-wide Organización Latinoamericana de Arqueología Subacuática. Identified goals were to establish a regional network of professional support and to work towards the adoption and implementation of the 2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage (UNESCO Convention) throughout the region.

Pilar's contribution to maritime archaeology in Latin America continued through courses and other initiatives

aimed at archaeologists and other professionals from various countries of the region. The last course she promoted, with support of UNESCO, took place in 2019, again in Campeche. With the financial support of Spain, the course included participants from Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and from Mexico as host country, all of whom received training from specialized professors from Mexico and Spain.

International Collaboration

With growing respect from Mexican and international scientific circles, Pilar expanded her influence by actively consulting with other Central and South American nations and offering advice on how to establish programs to protect their submerged cultural resources. Dolores Elkin, Director of the Underwater Archaeology Program in Argentina's National Institute of Anthropology remarked:

I first met Pilar Luna in Montevideo in 1994, when she was invited to lecture on underwater cultural heritage in the context of Uruguay's national archaeology conference. At that time, there were virtually no maritime archaeologists in South America. ... I was instantly impressed by this woman who was a pioneer in such a male-dominated environment. ... Pilar's model was ... enough for me to decide to become involved in maritime archaeology and to try to follow in her steps ... and putting together a team ... capable of studying and protecting the underwater cultural heritage. ... Twenty five years down the road it is fair to say that, directly or indirectly, the achievements of the Argentinian Underwater Archaeology Program at the National Institute of Anthropology are thanks to Pilar Luna. (Dolores Elkin 2020, elec. comm.)

Matthew Russell expressed the sentiments of many of Pilar's colleagues in highlighting that, "[t]hrough her international activities, Pilar serves as a powerful example of how a single, committed individual can influence national policies and steer a nation towards a preservation ethic" (Leshikar-Denton and Carrell 2011:6).

Service

Pilar led the Underwater Archaeology Vice-Directorate in increased participation in international forums held by such organizations as the Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA), the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), UNESCO, and the World Archaeological Congress (WAC). She served as chair of the Underwater Archaeology Scientific Committee for ICOMOS Mexico and as one of the four international advisors for the National Geographic Society.

Pilar served on the Mexican delegation during development of the 2001 UNESCO Convention and was instrumental in Mexico's ratification of the UNESCO Convention on 5 July 2006. She served as vice-chairperson of the first meeting of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Body (STAB) to the States Parties held in Cartagena, Spain, in June 2010. Lyndel V. Prott, former director of the Cultural Heritage Division of UNESCO wrote:

During the negotiations, [Pilar] was one of the most active and influential figures. She often represented the interests of the Latin American States and she was a most knowledgeable source of information. ... She also proved to have considerable diplomatic skills, being able to persuade with both arguments and humor. ... I believe it is fair to say that, without her participation, the text of the Convention as adopted would not appear as it now does. (Leshikar-Denton and Carrell 2011:5)

Pilar first attended an SHA conference in 1980, making international and professional connections and raising awareness of underwater archaeology in Mexico. In recognition of her pioneering role, in 1982 Pilar was invited to join the Advisory Council on Underwater Archaeology (ACUA), becoming its first woman member, and was elected to emeritus status in 2002. She also served on the SHA UNESCO committee, providing an important international perspective to the society.

Friends and colleagues regularly sought out Pilar's perspective. Robert Grenier, former chief of underwater archaeology at Parks Canada and past president of ICOMOS International Committee on Underwater Cultural Heritage, wrote of her innate wisdom: "I often had to rely on advice from respected colleagues in periods of crisis. None could equal Pilar as my most reliable advisor; her incredible judgement, her overall vision, her

well-balanced sense of values and her indefatigable rigor made her advice irreplaceable” (Leshikar-Denton and Carrell 2011:6). She also served on the Ships of Discovery Board of Directors (1989), ICOMOS International Committee on Underwater Cultural Heritage (1992), and the Waitt Institute for Discovery Advisory Committee (2006).

A Tireless Advocate

In an effort to create a national and international consciousness regarding the importance of submerged cultural patrimony in Mexico and beyond, Pilar presented numerous lectures, wrote articles, and gave interviews on radio, television, and in the popular press. These activities included the scientific community, diving groups, fishermen, and the public. Francisco Alves, former head of Portugal’s Nautical and Underwater Archaeology Branch, expressed his “admiration of her professional, scientific and leadership skills, her tremendous human personality, and her talent as an engaging and clear communicator” (Leshikar-Denton and Carrell 2011:5).

One of Pilar’s most relevant publications is *Underwater and Maritime Archaeology in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Leshikar-Denton and Erreguerena 2008). It was coedited with Margaret Leshikar-Denton and was inspired by a symposium on the subject at the Fifth World Archaeological Congress (WAC-5) held in Washington, D.C., in 2003. Lyndel Prott particularly commended the work:

This book has long been needed and is a very valuable demonstration of the variety and significance of the underwater heritage of this region. Its appearance contributes to the understanding and the debate on ratification of the 2001 Convention at a time when many States are working towards its acceptance. (Leshikar-Denton and Carrell 2011:5–6)

Honors

Pilar was recognized for her advocacy and international influence in the field of underwater archaeology on several occasions. These include awards from the Society for Historical Archaeology. She twice received the society’s award of merit, in 1997 for her efforts in underwater

archaeology in Mexico, and again in 2016 for her work in promoting and the adoption of the UNESCO 2001 Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage. In 2011, Pilar received the society’s prestigious lifetime-achievement J. C. Harrington Medal. Pilar was the first Latin American woman and only the second underwater archaeologist to receive it. It was fitting that Pilar received the award at the society’s annual conference in Austin, Texas, a location near the border with Mexico that provided Pilar’s family members and Mexican friends and colleagues the best opportunity to attend and share in the joyous occasion.

On 1 February 2020, Pilar received the prestigious Alfonso Caso Medal, given on the 124th anniversary of Caso’s birthday. Caso is one of the founding figures of Mexican archaeology and anthropology, and was the founder of the National Institute of Anthropology and History in 1940. Pilar was recognized for her 40 years of work in underwater archaeology. This award is given only to those researchers who have played a significant role in the development of INAH, including Matos Moctuzuma, Pilar’s teacher and one of Mexico’s leading archaeologists.

Mentorship and Legacy

In spite of physical ailments, including a near-fatal bout with histoplasmosis acquired during a cave excavation in the Yucatán and a back injury that occurred during the abandonment of a sinking ship in Alaska, Pilar succeeded in no small measure because of her kindness, sincerity, and her attitude about life. Pilar was a generous, warm, and committed mentor and friend (Fig. 5).

When Pilar was elected to ACUA in 1982, she was already a legend among the comparatively few women actively involved in underwater archaeology. Toni Carrell said:

When I met Pilar in 1980, I knew that she was someone special. Against all odds, she had achieved tremendous recognition in her home country and it was clear she had a passion for underwater archaeology. Within minutes, I felt I had known Pilar my whole life; she quickly became my hero, my mentor, and my very dear lifelong friend. I could always count on her to listen and give generously of her time and affection. I try to follow her example and, when faced with a decision or asked for advice, I often ask



Fig. 5 Pilar Luna overlooking the sea in Veracruz, 2016. (Photo courtesy of SAS-INAH, Underwater Archaeology Vice-Directorate.)

myself what wise words of comfort and guidance Pilar would give. One of my fondest memories are the times we spent in Paris during the UNESCO Convention negotiations. It was a huge honor to share the SHA Award of Merit with Pilar in 2016. (Toni Carrell 2020, pers. comm.)

It may be fitting to mention that, during the Paris 2001 UNESCO Convention negotiations, the professional and personal network of Pilar Luna, Toni Carrell, Dolores Elkin, and Margaret (Peggy) Leshikar-Denton was given the bold name of “Las Chicas Radicales” by Francisco Alves from Portugal, who recognized the commitment, diplomacy, and tenacity of this team. Las Chicas shared the SHA Award of Merit in 2016 for their work toward ratification of the UNESCO Convention.

Peggy Leshikar-Denton met Pilar in 1980 at the Albuquerque SHA conference, where Pilar encouraged and, later, supported her master’s research into Mexica-Aztec watercraft at the Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City. Peggy shared that

Pilar and I had the good fortune to work together on the 1980 Cayman Islands Project with Roger Smith, where we developed a lasting personal and professional bond that continued over the next four decades. Pilar invited me to join INAH projects in Mexico and we cherished our time as roommates at SHA Conferences and the Paris 2001 UNESCO Convention negotiations. As ICUCH members, we traveled to meetings around the world, always working for the protection of underwater cultural heritage, and taking a few extra days to enjoy cultural experiences along the way. We shared our professional passion as

organizers of the Latin American and Caribbean symposium at WAC-5 (2003), resulting in its publication (2008). It was a privilege to share the 2016 SHA Award of Merit. Pilar was wise and calm, prepared equally for challenge or success; she deeply influenced my life. In spite of her worldly accomplishments, Pilar’s philosophy was that when we leave this earth, we take with us only what we have become as human beings. (Margaret Leshikar-Denton 2020, elec. comm.)

Dolores (Loli) Elkin took to heart Pilar’s call to leadership and established Argentina’s underwater archaeology program. Loli reflected on Pilar’s strength of character:

Well beyond her professionalism as an archaeologist and heritage manager, Pilar was simply a wonderful human being. Extremely talented but never arrogant, tenacious and with strong convictions yet respectful and willing to listen to those who disagreed with her, passionate but also calm and wise, entertaining and funny but always classy. Incredibly generous, sympathetic, sensitive, loving and ready to help at any time. Words seem not enough to describe such an amazing person. I will be forever grateful to Pilar for having been my mentor in maritime archaeology, but the greatest privilege was that she was my friend. (Dolores Elkin 2020, elec. comm.)

Helena Barba-Meinecke, responsible for underwater archaeology in the Yucatán Peninsula under the vice-directorate, recalls Pilar’s impact on her life:

I met Pilar when I was 19, when she visited my Uncle Román and Aunt Beatriz. From that first moment, I was captivated. She was always my example to follow and since then I considered her as a warrior woman ahead of her time. She has left us an invaluable legacy and an example of life; she is my mentor and friend. Pilar was a great woman who knew how to communicate, always with great affection, a sense of teamwork, dedication, and a strong passion for the life. She will always be present through all who follow in her footsteps. (Helena Barba-Meinecke 2020, elec. comm.)

Flor Trejo was an early team member and was involved in one of Pilar’s most notable projects, the search for

Nuestra Señora del Juncal. Flor has continued in the vice-directorate and is a maritime historian and project manager of the 1630–1631 New Spain Fleet Research Project.

I met Pilar in 1996, when she began to build a team of young researchers in order to launch one of her most complex projects, finding the remains of *Nuestra Señora del Juncal*, sunk in 1631. This ship was sought-after by treasure hunters because of the amount of precious metals it carried. Pilar defended this site from salvage for many years. In the 2012 campaign, a 45-day geophysical survey, I saw all the challenges she managed to solve day by day. Nothing bent her. Her legacy and her holistic approach to work, committed but enlightened by human insight, will remain always in our memories. (Flor Trejo 2020, elec. comm.)

Laura Carrillo was also an early team member, beginning in 1994 at an underwater archaeology course. Today she continues to work in the vice-directorate.

I had the good fortune to meet Pilar during the Underwater Archeology course in 1994. Those of us whose paths crossed on this excellent program, met a strict Pilar, but with that warmth and human quality that always characterized her. A year later, she invited me to participate in the *Nuestra Señora del Juncal* project, predecessor to the New Spain Fleet of 1630–1631 project, later offering me the opportunity to develop the archaeological project at Chinchorro Bank. Pilar was a very important person for me, both professionally and personally, always empathetic and interested in the life stories of the people around her, always supporting and encouraging us to be better. Infinite thanks dear Pilar, your remembrance and teachings will remain in our memory, navigate happily through that unknown sea. (Laura Carrillo 2020, elec. comm.)

To Roberto Junco, tasked with leading the vice-directorate after Pilar's retirement in 2017, she was more than just an admired professional colleague:

Most of the people she met will agree there was an aura around her in the way she talked and treated everyone. Personally, it was a privilege to work with her for so many years. Like many of us, we will always be indebted to Pilar for her kindness and interest in us as human beings, our personal

situations, our dreams and desires. A bit of a mother figure and a mentor, she gave many of us the tools to continue our dreams of a professional career in underwater archaeology. I cannot thank her enough for believing in me more than I believed in myself. I feel a great responsibility to occupy her place at the Subdirección de Arqueóloga Subacuática since 2017. She is always on my mind when it comes to decision making. Her departure is a big loss. I am grateful to have had her as my boss and friend all those years. (Roberto Junco 2020, elec. comm.)

On 15 March 2020, María del Pilar Luna Erreguerena once again embarked on her own road.

Caminante, son tus huellas
el camino y nada más;

Caminante, no hay camino,
se hace camino al andar.

Al andar se hace el camino,
y al volver la vista atrás
se ve la senda que nunca
se ha de volver a pisar.

Caminante, no hay camino
sino estelas en la mar. (Machado 2007)

References

- Leshikar-Denton, Margaret E., and Toni L. Carrell
2011 J. C. Harrington Medal in Historical Archaeology: María del Pilar Luna Erreguerena. *Historical Archaeology* 45(2):1–6.
- Leshikar-Denton, Margaret E., and Pilar Luna Erreguerena (editors)
2008 *Underwater and Maritime Archaeology in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, CA.
- Machado, Antonio
2007 Caminante, no hay camino/Traveler, There Is No Road. In *Fields of Castille/Campos de Castilla: A Dual Language Book*, Stanley Appelbaum, editor and translator, pp. 94–95. Dover, New York, NY.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.