

# Book Reviews

## Handbook of Middle American Indians

To summarize the information gained by several generations of researchers is an awesome task, even when the field of specialization covered is a limited one scarcely out of the stage of pioneering exploration. Volumes 2 and 3 of *The Handbook of Middle American Indians, Archaeology of Southern Mesoamerica* (University of Texas Press, Austin, 1966. 1102 pp., \$15 per volume), edited by Gordon R. Willey, achieve a degree of completeness in this enormous undertaking that the rapid expansion of research in the area will probably make impossible for future compilations. These two volumes, and the entire 11-volume series under the general editorship of Robert Wauchope, will undoubtedly be the most widely used and frequently quoted reference source on the archeology and ethnography of Middle America for many years to come.

The 39 articles (by 31 authors and co-authors) in these volumes deal with five geographic subdivisions of Southern Mesoamerica: the Guatemalan Highlands, the Pacific Coast of Guatemala and Chiapas, including the upper Grijalva Basin and Chiapas Highlands, the Maya Lowlands, Southern Veracruz and Tabasco, and Oaxaca. The uneven distribution of archeological investigation is evident in the allocation of articles. Fifteen articles deal with the Maya Lowlands, nine each with Oaxaca and the Guatemalan Highlands, four with Veracruz-Tabasco, and only two with the important Pacific coastal slopes. One or two syntheses or general surveys are provided for each of the areas, and for the better known areas, specialized topics (sculpture, architecture, writing and calendrics, pottery, figurines, settlement patterns, and preconquest ethnology, for example) are presented in separate articles.

The summary articles vary considerably in content and approach because of the differential states of knowledge with respect to the various areas

and the different viewpoints of the authors. All provide good background information and an arrangement of important sites into broad temporal periods. The surveys by E. M. Shook (of the Guatemalan Coast) and by G. W. Lowe and J. A. Mason (of Chiapas) are based on data obtained from limited reconnaissance and therefore stress the distribution of sites and artifacts in time and space. Only for the excellent résumé of the Chiapa de Corzo sequence was the sort of information available that permits deeper insight into culture history. Somewhat more data are available for the Veracruz-Tabasco area discussed by M. D. Coe, but many of the reports are chaotic and contradictory. Coe has taken the trouble to rework primary sources and provide the first reasonable synthesis for the area. S. F. Borhegyi (on the Guatemalan Highlands) and I. Bernal (on Oaxaca) provide excellent and up-to-date syntheses for areas in which much information is unpublished or has been published in obscure sources; both reconstructions are as good as, or better than, anything else now available. For the best known of the areas, the Maya Lowlands, E. W. Andrews and J. E. S. Thompson provide separate syntheses for the Northern and Southern sectors respectively. Andrews's point that the Northern Lowlands deserve an interpretation independent from schemes devised to fit areas to the south should be influential in future studies, although some of his specific interpretations will be controversial. Thompson has previously done such outstanding work in interpreting the large body of data from the Southern Lowlands that many of his ideas are already familiar, but in this synthesis he has stressed new information that changes earlier hypotheses.

The selection of specialized topics reveals the traditional emphasis of Mesoamerican archeology on elite culture. Thirteen articles deal with archi-

tecture, sculpture, and writing, but only two treat settlement patterns and neither domestic structures nor cultural ecology are considered as separate topics. More information on the latter topics will certainly be available for consideration in future compilations.

A number of the statements in these volumes already need revision. This is less a criticism of the authors and editors than a tribute to the unusual vitality of Mesoamerican studies in the last decade. It is now almost impossible to write anything that is not outdated in some respect by the time it is published. The fact that changes of interpretation are inevitable should not seriously effect the value of the data in the handbook series.

Any system of organization has inherent weaknesses. In the present case, the presentation of material by geographic divisions tends to obscure the interrelationships between areas. Although there are many references to external influences on particular areas, it is difficult to comprehend the ways in which all of Mesoamerica functioned as an interrelated system. A few articles dealing with important trends that cross-cut areal boundaries would have been welcome, but perhaps they will be forthcoming in later volumes of the series.

The illustrations and references are one of the most useful aspects of these books. That the illustrations are well chosen and of high quality is demonstrated on the cover of this issue of *Science*. The maps and charts provide much new data and will be used as much as the text. The 37-page reference section is comprehensive through 1960, with references after that date sporadic and dependent on the date of final revision of each article.

In short, this is a basic research source without which no library that deals even peripherally with Mesoamerican archeology will be complete.

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## Man and the Sea

**La Découverte des Mers** (Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1965. 128 pp. Paper) by Jean-Marie Peres is a brief introduction to the history of man's interest in the sea, from the Mediterranean world to the great explorations, to the beginnings of ocean-