

# Book Reviews

## On Transoceanic Influences

**Man across the Sea.** Problems of Pre-Columbian Contacts. Papers from a symposium, Santa Fe, N.M., May 1968. CARROLL L. RILEY, J. CHARLES KELLEY, CAMPBELL W. PENNINGTON, and ROBERT L. RANDS, Eds. University of Texas Press, Austin, 1971. xviii, 552 pp., illus. \$12.50.

Although modest in bulk, this book is ecumenical in scope, for it brings together in concise form virtually all significant data upon the problem of human contacts between the Old World and the New before 1492 but after the hypothetical peopling of the Americas by way of the Bering land bridge during the Pleistocene. It presents the substance of a symposium sponsored by the Society for American Archaeology, with introduction and conclusions by the editors and papers by 25 separate authors—archeologists, ethnologists, linguists, geneticists, botanists, geographers, social scientists—who focus on the many facets of theory and evidence that relate to the central theme.

The book is organized in three main sections, the first dealing with theoretical and methodological approaches, the second with specific archeological evidence, and the third with possible human agency in transporting certain plants and animals. Along the way, attention is given also to linguistic similarities, social psychology, cultural dynamics, and even mythology. Several approaches are followed:

1) Interpretation of evidence of "hard" archeological data. (In future attempts at such interpretation, it might be helpful to enlist a legal philosopher who could apply the principles of evidentiary assessment developed in law and logic.)

2) Inquiring into the implications of trait similarities between Old and New World peoples. (One paper lists almost 100 "common" traits for Mesoamerica and the Near East alone.) But the feeling that close similarities conclusively indicate massive and prolonged contact is being weakened by the accumulating evidence of prolonged formative sequences underlying

various New World civilizations and by recognition of the processes of convergence in different societies.

3) Drawing inferences from language similarities, especially with respect to names of plants and animals.

4) Assessment of the significance of the distribution of plants, especially in terms of their genetic characters, their dependence on man for propagation, and their viability over long periods of time in saltwater or in the stomachs of birds.

5) Assessment of the adequacy of theoretical and methodological models for testing supposed patterns of diffusion and of locally generated human ingenuity.

Most of the material has been published elsewhere, but much of it is effectively "new" to the nonspecialist reader, to whom many of the original sources are not readily available. A monumental bibliography of more than 1600 titles and an excellent index add to the usefulness of the volume. On the other hand, this is not merely a handbook, but a fresh presentation of carefully digested data by many of the leading exponents of the controversial issues involved.

Other approaches, which are touched upon but not developed, may warrant further consideration. For one, the whole field of human and social psychology, through which evolutionary trends and capabilities may be conditioned by remote genetic inheritances, might be brought to bear on the problem. The Bering pioneers were men out of Asia; is it unreasonable to suspect that their development might have been determined in some degree by that factor? Further exploitation of biological data also seems desirable: in parasitology, considering the cataclysmic spread of epidemic diseases after 1492, and in the history of infestations of rodents, insects, and other camp-following parasites.

The papers dealing with archeological remains are the most direct, since they focus on tangible items, such as pottery, stone tools, boats, and architecture. But it will startle many readers

to learn that, despite morphological resemblances, not a single object of Old World origin, except for the Norse remains, has been recorded from a New World context of unquestionably pre-Columbian date. It would be facile, however, to accept this negative evidence as conclusive, in the light of the many close parallels in artifact shapes, artistic styles, social structures, and linguistic forms, especially in relation to known ancient navigational skills and seaworthy vessels, which are comprehensively discussed by several authors. The complex arguments for and against human transport of plants (cotton, gourd, sweet potato, bean, maize) and at least one animal (chicken) are fully adumbrated.

But what comes to mind most forcefully from the symposium as a whole is the need, emphasized by several authors, for sophisticated theoretical, methodological, and evidentiary standards for handling the recorded data in broad perspective transcending the view of isolated elements.

The evolution of anthropological thought from early diffusionists, through middle-ground observers with major concern for cultural interplay within the New World itself, to those who find no significant evidence of Old World influence in the Americas, is well documented. The controversy happily now seems to have reached a plane of rationality on which everyone may stand prepared to accept at least the plausibility if not the certainty of transoceanic contacts. It is recognized that the basic question is not whether ancient mariners actually made New World landfalls but whether the resultant influences were sufficiently sustained and significant to effect a clear modification of the local scene. Or, as the editors phrase it: "Is or is not the New World a . . . laboratory in which the channelled development of culture . . . can tell us something of the nature of man?" The implications of the answer to that question are tremendous, and it is toward a broader understanding of the problem that the symposium makes its impact.

The numerous papers in this collection are not of equal persuasive power or of equal profundity. But all contribute substantially to an exhaustive compendium of knowledge concerning the problem at hand.

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