

Rev. do Museu de Arqueologia e Etnologia, São Paulo, 8: 298, 1998.

SORENSEN, JONH L.; MARTIN, H. RAISH. *Pre-Columbian Contact With Americas Across the Oceans: an Annotated Bibliography*. Second edition, revised. Volume 1: A-K, 602 pages; Volume 2: L-Z, 593 pages. Research Press, Provo UT, 1996. ISBN 0-934893-21-7.

Betty J. Meggers*

In spite of its exceptional quality and comprehensive scope, the first edition of this work, published in 1990, did not receive the attention it deserved. Nevertheless, it went out of print and now has been reissued with revisions that enhance its utility. More than 1250 of the 5613 original titles have been deleted, more than 600 new titles have been substituted, and 900 abstracts have added or revised based on examination of the text.

The bibliography originated from Sorenson's decision on retirement in 1985 to examine sources he had not seen. He soon discovered "an obstinate ignorance on the part of most of those engaged in the often vitriolic discussion of this question over most of the twentieth century. We were not surprised that many diffusionists had strong biases and limited mastery of the sources.... What had not been so obvious was the attitude of more conventional scholars, who tended to make sweeping assertions about (usually the lack of) interhemispheric cultural relationships and processes while being only modestly informed about relevant facts, methods, or theories" (vii-viii). Furthermore, "some diffusionists of ill repute in professional circles in fact came through showing extensive knowledge, superior logic, and considerable caution, while a surprising array of famous academicians usually ignored in the arguments over interhemispheric diffusion were found to display closet diffusionism" (viii).

Sorenson takes the position that "Only on an empirical basis should anyone proceed to a diffusionist or a non-diffusionist stance. Yet repeatedly scholars of high repute have used poorly thought out, factually dubious arguments to exorcise the subjectively unwelcome proposition of pre-Columbian settlement in America from the Old World" (viii). To facilitate evaluation of the evidence, topics include the capabilities and operation of

ancient and indigenous watercraft, historical maps suggesting first-hand knowledge of New World geography, similarities in languages, duplications in art, technology, etc. Other entries discuss antidiusionist and diffusionist arguments and criteria for distinguishing diffusion from independent invention. English, Spanish, French, and German sources are included.

Annotation summarize the principal content, often quoting the author's words, and are sufficiently detailed to make the bibliography a major research tool in itself. This is especially important because many publications are in obscure and inaccessible sources. Browsing reveals numerous intriguing similarities that need to be explained before we can reconstruct human history and understand cultural evolution.

It is unfortunate that objective evaluation of the evidence is increasingly impeded by misguided assumptions that to suggest that indigenous Americans did not independently invent their entire cultural repertoire is to imply they were unable to do so. On the contrary, the unique ability of member of our species to adopt ideas and inventions made elsewhere eliminates the need for any group to repeat all stages of development. Those in a position to "copy" foreign traits have always had the advantage. It is their failure to do so that needs to be explained.

These volumes provide an unparalleled view of the theoretical issues and magnitude of evidence for and against precolumbian transoceanic contacts. As such, they deserve a place in every library. We owe a debt of gratitude to Sorenson for providing so comprehensive an introduction to one of the most significant and fascinating aspects of New World prehistory.

(*) National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, EUA.