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Title

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Abstract *Review of Ancient American Indians: Their Origins, Civilizations, and Old World Connections* (1991), by Paul R. Cheesman and Millie F. Cheesman.

Paul R. Cheesman and Millie F. Cheesman, *Ancient American Indians: Their Origins, Civilizations and Old World Connections*. Bountiful, UT: Horizon, 1991. 273 pp. \$18.95.

Reviewed by Martin Raish

Several years ago I attended a presentation that consisted of pairs of slides juxtaposing objects from the Old World with similar ones from the New. The point was to show so many Old/New World correspondences that those in attendance could see for themselves that people had sailed across the oceans in ancient times and had influenced the cultures of the Americas.

One pair of images that I especially remember matched the mask of Agamemnon from the royal tomb in Mycenae with an example of Mixtec jewelry from Oaxaca, Mexico. But while many in the audience were ohing and ahing at the apparent *resemblances*—both were, after all, gold faces—I was pondering their equally notable *differences*. For example, the first was nearly life-size, portrayed a real person, and was fashioned from a single lump of gold, while the latter was only three inches tall, was an image of the god Xipe Totec, and was made by the lost-wax casting process.

This sort of slipshod “scholarship”—that shines light on only those bits of information that support the argument at hand while ignoring everything else—has always annoyed me. So when I saw these same two objects on the cover of this book I knew that I was in for a disappointing experience. I was right.

This is really two books in one. The first is a travel guide to major archaeological sites in North America, designed to “acquaint the reader with some of the more prominent” of these places and with some contemporary Native American groups. Although well-intended, it is poorly balanced in its coverage of the various sites. All are supposedly “major,” but the space devoted to “Anasazi Valley”—a privately owned site near St. George, Utah—seems excessive when notable places such as Canyon de Chelly and Hovenweep are not mentioned at all. Similarly, this seems an inappropriate context to discuss controversial and poorly documented objects such as stone tablets with engravings “similar to Maya pictoglyphs [*sic*],” or with the Ten Commandments inscribed around the face of a man named “Mose” (= Moses).

The second half of the book consists of about fifty pairs of photographs, each showing one object from the Old World and one from the New: arches, fertility goddesses, seals, pan pipes, gold masks (of course), pyramids, and so forth. According to the dust jacket, the intent of this arrangement is to "clearly show the strong cultural links between the two areas." A few of the photo pairs are indeed intriguing, such as the "mudra" gestures from China and Copan. But the majority are so general— weaving, post-and-lintel construction, fish hooks, metates, and similar items that are common to hundreds of cultures—that they offer little real evidence of Old/New World connections.

My major complaint, however, is that the photographs are poorly identified and are accompanied by virtually no additional descriptive or explanatory text. For example, the "ziggurat pyramid" of Djoser at Saqqara is compared to the "ziggurat pyramid" (which is not really a "ziggurat" pyramid) at Chichén Itzá, apparently because their outward shapes are similar. But the only reference to these is a vague statement that, "as we consider Old and New World temples and burial practices, we immediately see the parallels between their ancient temples" (p. 217). No mention is made of their differences, such as the fact that one has stairs on all four sides and a temple on top, while the other has neither.

On the other hand several items are mentioned very briefly in the text—the sweet potato, phallic symbols, coins—but are not accompanied by visual evidence. Notable is the case of the Bat Creek Stone, described as "an unimpeachable archaeological find, certainly strengthening the Diffusionist theory," but not pictured. The failure to link the text and the images into a coherent whole not only makes this part of the book less enjoyable to read, but more difficult to study.

The book's usefulness is even further diminished by the absence of an index. For example, the authors compiled a list of "Cultural Parallels—Old and New Worlds" that includes many interesting items (although oddly, it omits chiasmus, which is discussed in the text). Some are so general (e.g., pottery, burials, motifs) that I can only assume that the authors are referring to a particular (but unspecified) type of these things. Others are so distinctive that their mere presence (in both continents?) must be significant (e.g., maize, avocado, "Olmec helmet"). But it is nearly impossible to follow up on any of these ideas without an index.

The bibliography is of little help, either. For one thing, it is out of date. It contains about eighty-five references, but only three are more recent than 1980, and all these are works by Latter-day Saint writers. It is also incomplete, for although some of the entries duplicate those found in the chapter notes, others do not, so a reader must be (dis)content with whatever bits of bibliography he or she can mine. For example, the authors cite a fascinating story of "an old Indian chief" who said that "their God created the heavens and the earth and all things that in them are." The footnote directs one to a citation of an MIA manual written by Sidney B. Sperry in 1937. This is certainly neither an easily accessible nor particularly reliable source, but the only other hint is a sentence that begins, "In his history of the Indian of the Mississippi Du Pratz says . . ." Unfortunately there is no entry for this author in the bibliography, so once again the serious student is left frustrated. (Does this refer to "A History of Louisiana . . ." by Le Page du Pratz, the eighteenth-century French writer? We may never know.)

This book does contain some valid information and offers a few interesting comments on Native American cultures. But it also has too many ill-founded conjectures and poorly documented sources and is flawed in its physical arrangement. I cannot recommend it, either for the casual reader, who will be unwittingly misled, or the serious student, who will be unable to use it for further enlightenment. Much of the material appears in Cheesman's other books (often in clearer photographs), and what few new items are given here are hardly worth the effort to pursue.