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Pre-Columbian Contact with the Americas Across the Oceans: An Annotated Bibliography, second edition

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BOOK REVIEWS

Pre-Columbian Contact with The Americas Across the Oceans: An Annotated Bibliography, second edition, revised, 2 volumes, 1195 pages (including a 72 page index) following two brief prefaces and an introduction, by John L. Sorenson, senior author, and Martin H. Raish. Provo, Utah, Research Press, 1996.

This set is undoubtedly the most complete bibliography of publications dealing with early transoceanic contacts between the Old and New Worlds that has yet appeared. It is of special interest to ISCSC members, both because senior author John Sorenson is himself an ISCSC member and because it contains twenty-nine references to the work of Distinguished ISCSC Visiting Speaker George Carter.

Since Sorenson is a diffusionist and a transoceanist, it is to be expected that his bibliography contains considerably more references to diffusionist literature than to antidiffusionist literature. (The anti-diffusionist position, now usually referred to as inventionism, is more often referred to by Sorenson as autochthonism or indigenism.) Even so, over a thousand inventionist publications are cited and discussed.

Moreover, as the authors make clear, the issue of cultural diffusion is not one on which there are only two positions, inventionist and diffusionist. Diffusionists themselves are divided over the question of culture-transmission by sea. Some think that there was extensive transoceanic travel before the Vikings reached Newfoundland, while others think that long distance contacts took place chiefly, if not exclusively, over land. Inventionists too are divided over the question of the extent of creativity in individual societies, some seeing it as heavily outweighing borrowed culture-elements, while others see invention and diffusion as being roughly in balance.

Interestingly, the authors cite almost three times as much evidence for early diffusion of culture across the Pacific as for such

diffusion across the Atlantic. At first, this discrepancy seems counter-intuitive, since the Pacific is so much wider than the Atlantic. A moment's thought, however, should remind us that the Pacific contains many more islands than does the Atlantic and that islands readily serve as migratory stepping-stones.

In some cases, the very definition of transoceanic travel is in doubt. One of these cited by the authors is that of contact by sea between Meso-America and the Ecuadorian/Peruvian coast. Another is the Indonesian migration from Borneo to Madagascar, which presumably explains the existence of the non-Bantu language and culture of the Malagasy Republic. In each case there is disagreement, even among diffusionists, about whether the voyagers involved followed a coasthugging itinerary or launched forth across the open ocean.

No matter what one's school of archeological thought, there are some questions on which the rich mine of information cited by Sorenson and Raish is likely to change, or at least influence, readers' confirmed opinions about early cultures. For me, at least, one such question is that of the existence of pre-Columbian scripts in South America. Till I read this bibliography, I had assumed that all apparent writings from the pre-Hispanic Andean area were either forged or illusory. The authors, however, cite 37 cases of apparent writing, at least some of which is in boustrophedon (virtually assuring that it is not a mere signary) and much of which is in Chinese ideograms.

Being, like Sorenson, both a diffusionist and a transoceanist, I am predictably sympathetic to his orientation with regard to ancient culture contacts; so I regard this bibliography as a treasure-house of data. But even staunch inventionists, I think, could find much detailed information here to support their position. And scholars of every stripe should be able to gain new knowledge and insight concerning the culture-traits and culture-complexes of both hemispheres from *Pre-Columbian Contact*.

Roger W. Wescott