



*Art Book Review*

No. 4

£2.50 \$5.00

*An International Review of Art Literature*

## American Indians Galore by Robert K.G. Temple

*Indian Clothing before Cortes: Mesoamerican Costumes from the Codices* by Patricia Rieff Anawalt, 232 pp., 16 colour and hundreds of b & w illustrations (University of Oklahoma Press \$39.95) ISBN 0 8061 1650 1. *The Navajo Atlas: Environments, Resources, People, and History of the Diné Bikeyah* by James M. Goodman, 109 pp., 48 maps and graphs plus miscellaneous illustrations (University of Oklahoma Press \$17.50) ISBN 0 8061 1621 8. *Chief Left Hand, Southern Arapaho* by Margaret Coel, 338 pp., 27 illustrations and three maps (University of Oklahoma Press \$12.75) ISBN 0 8061 1602 1. *The Phoenix of the Western World: Quetzalcoatl and the Sky Religion* by Burr Cartwright Brundage, 349 pp., 36 illustrations (University of Oklahoma Press \$17.50) ISBN 0 8061 1773 7. *Origins of Pre-Columbian Art* by Terence Grieder, 241 pp., 90 illustrations (University of Texas Press, Austin £15) ISBN 0 292 76021 3. *The Ancient Kingdoms of Mexico* by Nigel Davies, 272 pp., 38 illustrations (Allen Lane, £12.50) ISBN 0 7139 1245 6.

For several decades the University of Oklahoma Press has been producing its remarkable series of books, 'The civilization of the American Indian series', now extending to volume 160. It might reasonably be argued that this series of books is the State of Oklahoma's major contribution to world culture, since few others come to mind. The standards of production, editing, illustration, and sheer quality, of this series are a magnificent achievement. The Oklahoma books may always be turned to with confidence, for they will always be reliable, sound in their content, stimulating, and a pleasure to handle. We are not disappointed with the three latest volumes, or with the separate *Navajo Atlas* published jointly with the Mellon Foundation.

Patricia Anawalt's labour of love, a quarter of a century's hard work, is now before us. This lavishly produced masterpiece will be a standard work on its subject for as long as there are books and people to read them. In the ancient American cultures, perhaps as in

no others, the clothes worn by individuals were essential both to daily life and to the functioning of culture. As the authoress puts it: "To the Aztecs and their neighbours the wearing of appropriate ethnic and class apparel was strictly controlled by both custom and law. An individual's clothing immediately signalled not only cultural affiliation but rank and status as well. Since each Indian group dressed in a distinctive and characteristic manner, a great deal of ethnographic and historical information is contained in depictions of their clothing."

In other words, the motto of an ancient American Indian was simply: "You are what you wear." But the climate of Meso-America is such that ancient clothing does not survive as it does on occasion in Peru or Egypt. So what is the researcher to do? The answer is, she scours the surviving codices, both Indian and Spanish, for drawings and paintings, and scrutinizes the statues and carvings. The results are incredible, and appear so comprehensive that we have a complete Sears and

Roebuck Catalogue from Mexico, circa 1500 AD. Anyone interested in the history of costume must have this book. But more importantly, no one researching the cultures of ancient Meso-America would be advised to be without it. It isn't just capes and kilts, but a vast scholarly survey of the cultures through their dress. And one surprise is that the study reveals otherwise unknown cultural contacts and exchanges.

*The Navajo Atlas*, while absolutely splendid and impeccable, is a very specialized item indeed. Who will want it? Obviously the Navajos will love it, and prospectors and oil companies will need it. Everything you can think of is there – *if* you can think of it. It reveals a few titbits of information of relevance beyond the Reservation, such as that the Navajos only arrived in their present area about the same time as the Spaniards, being part of the very last wave of Asian migration southwards. The book is so comprehensive it even includes a photo taken from space . . . marvellous, superb! But what does one *do* with



it?

Margaret Coel's compelling and exciting book about the Indian Chief of the Southern Arapaho, named Left Hand, who spoke English, is a triumph of research and writing. She has spent years digging through primary sources and coming up with the facts. Anybody who has ever liked a cowboy movie will enjoy reading this. Did you ever wonder just how accurate Randolph Scott may have been when he was riding along, about to be ambushed by redskins? Throw away your Zane Grey novels, or switch off the TV. Now you can read the *real thing*: "Chivington barked a reprimand. 'I haven't had an Indian to eat for a long time,' he said. 'If you fool with me, and don't lead me to that camp, I'll have you for breakfast.'" Believe it or not, that is a quote, with a footnote! No need for fiction in the Wild West, — it all really happened. And just to remind you, there are some highly evocative old photos of forts, wagon trains, and Indian chiefs. Margaret Coel definitely not speak with forked tongue.

Burr Brundage is an enthusiast. He sweeps the reader along in his excitement and love of his subject so that the labyrinthine complexities appear to be no obstacle to understanding. Anyone who has ever tried to unravel the Quetzalcoatl traditions will know that Brundage is taking on the impossible. It can't be done. But, what fun he has trying! And he gets further than would seem humanly possible. The spirits of the chief priests must have been at his elbow. This is no tiresome scholarly tract, but an exhilarating adventure. It would interest anyone with a taste for the history and phenomenology of religions, or who wants to learn about one of the most bizarre and complex symbolic and iconographic systems ever conceived by the mind of man. Brundage makes research into ancient Mexican religion pure pleasure and enjoyment. He also has an uncanny knack at following his intuition to the possible solutions of several mysteries, or at least of pointing a way towards solutions. Brundage is also extraordinarily profound, and cuts through a lot of the undergrowth with a machete, revealing edifices underneath the jungle vines. Brundage may well be right when he suggests that Sahagun's description of Tula is not that of the Toltec Tula, but of the great city of Teotihuacan (since *Tullan* in Nahuatl "was a generic term referring to any command-

ing metropolis"). The implication of this is to transpose various legendary tales of Quetzalcoatl backwards by four centuries. By such new and bold interpretations does Brundage try to get at the truth. He does not hesitate to divide ancient Mexican religion into four separate sub-religions, of which the sky religion of Quetzalcoatl is only one. Brundage is nothing if not controversial. But he is not dogmatic. His is a refreshing and creative approach to a subject which could do with a good shake-up.

Terence Grieder is yet another enthusiast. Alas, he can't write as well as Brundage can. Sometimes one slows down, as if knee-deep in mud. His mind is ponderous, his words don't flow. But, if one is patient, the ideas are really exciting. This is a stimulating book, with fresh insights, and threatens to shake up the subject just as much as Brundage does his. Grieder has been at work for years on this theory of his, and now we can read all about it. There were three waves of cultural migration across the American continents. They are all related to other traces of three waves in various places in the Pacific. The aboriginal Indians of Brazil are not just vaguely but directly related to the aborigines of Australia, both representing survivals of the same culture, — the furthest and opposite tips of a great migratory wave, going back many, many thousands of years. Grieder is an enthusiastic cultural diffusionist. He won't have any of this nonsense of America being "isolated" from the rest of the world in the past. The three waves swept over the Americas from Asia, and not just by foot over the now-submerged Bering Straits. Greider says: "Second and Third Wave peoples may well have come by the typical ancient system of coasting — sailing from refuge to refuge within sight of land. The late settlement of Polynesia weakens the argument for early crossing of the Pacific and thus tends to support coastal sailing, but the mode of travel is a question for specialists in ancient transport and is tangential to the larger questions of cultural interaction."

Grieder is at pains to emphasize that ". . . it is surely an exaggeration to regard the Americas as isolated from general world culture. . . . the New World is a laboratory for the study of human culture, not because it was hermetically sealed off from Old World inventions but because it received human population and its earliest culture relatively

late and every succeeding element of culture correspondingly late. Thus, the New World is a *historical* laboratory where we are permitted to dive into the depths of the past from a platform in some respects already deep within it." Anthropologists and art historians will have much to challenge them in Grieder's book. The illustrations are of good quality and well-presented, though there might have been more of them. Production is superb.

Finally, we come to the latest work of the extraordinary Nigel Davies, a former Conservative Member of Parliament for Epping, who has moved to Mexico and gone ethnic in a big way. He started a second career as an archaeologist specializing in ancient Mexico, and he has a wide and profound understanding of his subject. This is his sixth book, and it is thoroughly excellent. It can be recommended to the novice, who will find it easy of access and fascinating on every page. Nigel Davies knows as well how to bring the ordinary reader into his world of ancient Mexico as he must have known how to charm little old ladies at cheese and wine parties and cut ribbons at village fetes. He writes in the engaging way that a good politician speaks. One wants to go on listening. He hacks away at the obscurity surrounding Mexico's oldest and most mysterious civilization, the Olmecs, with admirable deftness. There are a few things he leaves out: I wish he had mentioned that over 100,000 Olmec-style figurines have been found at Tlatilco, since that helps anyone appreciate the enormity of the matter. And also, he seems not to be aware that the archaeologist Linton Satterthwaite saw adobe platforms at Tlatilco, so that the site was not lacking in them as often supposed. (Thereby hangs a tale, but not one to be printed!) Also, he should not have treated the Izapan culture with such utter disregard. Naughty, naughty! But still, *bravo!*