

COMAS, JUAN. *Introducción a la Prehistoria General*. Publicaciones del Instituto de Historia, primera serie, núm. 74. Universidad Nacional Autónoma. 249 pp., 60 figs. México, 1962.

This book was expressly written by Professor Comas to serve as a base for the study of prehistory in his classes at the University of Mexico and allied institutions, but was not intended to be an exhaustive survey. Comas defines prehistory as the study of the remains of preliterate peoples, but has followed French practice in ending his account in both hemispheres with the introduction of food production.

All but the last few chapters are concerned with the evolution of man and culture during the Paleolithic epoch of western Europe, and the archeological, geological, and human-paleontological data offered by Comas make this the soundest and most up-to-date exposition of European prehistory in the Spanish language. This bias might have once sufficed for a work on "general prehistory",

but as far as the Old World is concerned it now seems that most of the important advances made by Stone Age man were made not in France and Spain, but rather in the Near East and Africa. One would have hoped for a presentation more balanced among the world's major areas.

The aboriginal peoples of the New World are reduced to the last of eighteen chapters. Comas has made the origin of the American Indian his special study. He rejects the theory of Hrdlicka that these peoples all belong to a single Mongoloid race, his main objection being their obvious high variability in morphology. Marshall Newman has viewed the variation among New World Indians, particularly in stature and weight, as the result of different kinds of natural selection operating on an originally homogeneous population, but this is also considered unlikely by Comas. He is sympathetic, however, to the hypotheses of a multiracial origin, variously advanced by Rivet, Imbelloni and Birdsell, with separate racial stocks coming into the New World across the Bering Straits (extravagant claims of trans-Pacific, trans-Atlantic, and even trans-Antarctic migrations he finds interesting but lacking in substantive proof). On the subject of the undoubted resemblances between the high cultures of the New World and the Old, he takes middle ground between the extreme diffusionists and the dyed-in-the-wool evolutionists.

In summary, this is an excellent and accurate introduction to prehistory for those whose interests largely lie in the human and cultural evolution of western Europe.<sup>1</sup>

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