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Review of "'Pictures of Record' Archaeological Slide Sets: Mesoamerican Survey I and Mexican Series (The Olmecs, El Tajin, The Aztecs, Teotihuacan, Monte Alban, Xochicalco, Tula)"

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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Archaeological Slide Sets: Mesoamerican Survey I. Mexican Series by

Review by: Diane Z. Chase and Arlen F. Chase

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clearly missing. Although the series focuses on the Classical Age, the viewer never senses what the classical achievement was, nor is there any discussion about what is meant by the term classical. Thus, although one thoroughly enjoys the pictorial feast ingested while watching these films, the lack of content leaves the belly feeling hollow.

John Oakley, Department of Classical Studies, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA

Archaeological Slide Sets: Mesoamerican Survey I.

100 slides, \$140

Mexican Series:

The Olmecs. 75 slides, \$105

El Tajin. 76 slides, \$106

The Aztecs. 68 slides, \$97

Teotihuacan. 96 slides, \$139

Monte Alban. 79 slides, \$109

Xochicalco. 50 slides, \$77

Tula. 60 slides, \$88

*Produced by Pictures of Record, Inc.,
119 Kettle Creek Road, Weston, CT 06883
(203) 227-3387*

The Mexican series of slides available from Pictures of Record can be of use to both the archaeologist and the art historian. The primary market for these slides, however, is likely to consist of non-Mesoamericanists, especially those who are either interested in the subject matter or need illustrative material for teaching.

All of the sets contain written material describing the site or sites as well as descriptions of each of the numbered slides and a short bibliography for further reference. Most of the slide sets follow a set format. First, an overall map of Mesoamerica locating the appropriate site(s) and then a partial site map for the specific site focused on are presented. Next come the architectural high points of the site(s), followed by details of murals or sculpture. Finally, a sampling of the more distinctive artifacts from the particular site(s) is shown.

The sets are of varying quality in terms of coverage and text. The slides comprising Mesoamerican Survey I are well presented and a generally useful set for introductory courses in either Mesoamerica, the New World, or General Archaeology. Many of the sets, however—and in particular the Aztec set—need updating in light of new finds or revised interpretations. In addition, all of the sets could use up-dated references in the written text, although it must be noted that the pictures themselves will never go out of date. Most of the slides in the various sets are good-quality pictures, but occasionally a few are not in focus, particularly several of the Monte Alban artifacts and some of the murals from Teotihuacan.

The Tula set has generally good slides, but suffers from a very simplistic dis-

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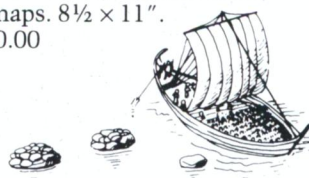
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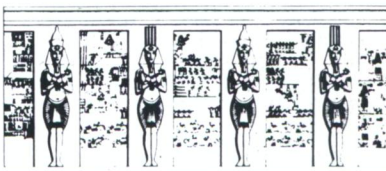
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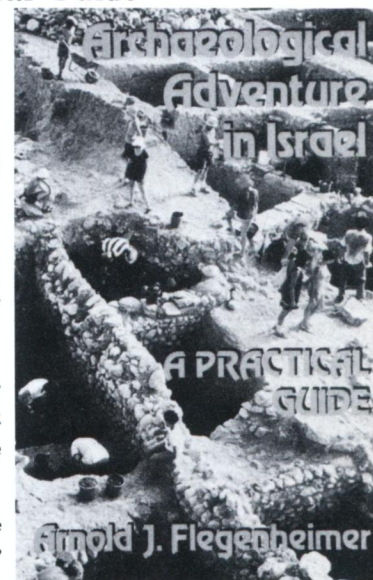
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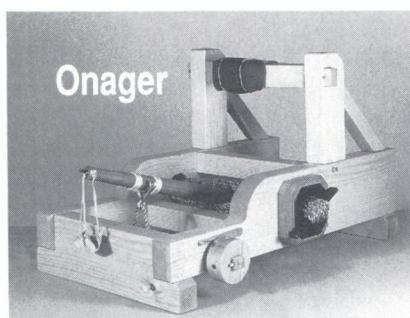
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cussion of relationships between Maya Chichen Itza and the Highland Mexico site of Tula. Particularly useful would be references to appropriate slides from Chichen Itza. Some descriptive material for the slide sets is exceedingly scarce, such as that for Xochicalco, which is less than one page in length and, while noting similarities to other sites, hardly leads an uninformed user to an informed understanding of this site.

The slides for Xochicalco show good architectural detail, but again, references to specific slides in other Pictures of Record sets would be in order. The set for Monte Alban includes a more detailed discussion than some, but even so there is little mention of the various researchers, theories, and differences of opinion and chronology which exist for this critical site. Shots of Monte Alban are of uneven quality, with a number out of focus and descriptions not always well coordinated with slides, such as a discussion of columns with a photo in which they are barely visible.

The text for the set dealing with Teotihuacan, perhaps the most pivotal site in the history of all of Mesoamerica, is generally good, as are the slides (although some of the mural shots, as mentioned, are out of focus). Discussion of Teotihuacan includes chronology and an indication that the map in the set is a partial one; nevertheless, a new slide should be added to show the layout and impressive size of this site. A bibliographic update is also in order. The Olmec set includes excellent shots of the sculpture for which this early civilization is famous, but contains no maps and has an outdated bibliography. The set dealing with the Aztecs, however, is the most in need of revision. An update of this set to include the "new" work in Mexico City is almost imperative. The set covering the site of El Tajin is generally good, although at least one slide is out of focus.

The overview set labeled Mesoamerica I is clearly the best of the series, containing as it does a selection of 10 to 25 slides from each of the individual sets (a few of them not the best quality). This compendium set has a general map but no other site maps, and includes coverage of the Olmec and Aztecs as well as the sites of Teotihuacan, Monte Alban (including Mitla and Lambityeco), El Tajin, Xochicalco, Tula, and Tenochtitlan.

While the sets are somewhat uneven in their coverage, both in the written text and in the slides themselves, they are still very useful for the individual who does not have his/her own slides from which to select, particularly for class lectures. And although not inexpensive they are significantly less than the cost of traveling to Mexico and attempting the difficult task of re-photographing the various sites and

their respective sculpture and artifacts. For those on a limited budget, Mesoamerica I is especially recommended since it contains many of the best slides from each of the sites, although the other site-specific sets are necessary to obtain detailed maps and a more thorough visual understanding of the vibrant Mesoamerican past.

Diane Z. Chase and Arlen F. Chase, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL

The Bookshelf

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tailed treatment of the evidence, however, shows that there are no indications of direct Mycenaean influence north of the Alps. Certainly amber deriving from the Baltic Sea was reaching Mycenae and other Greek sites by the sixteenth century B.C., so this was a time of long-distance trading contacts. But piece by piece, every item of evidence which generations of prehistorians had put forward to document the Mycenaean presence in north and central Europe is rejected. Of course the book is very much more positive than this. Harding discusses the nature of trade at the time, and establishes a clear picture of the nature of Mediterranean and European contacts. The outstanding feature of this book is its thoroughness; where many of the supposed links had previously been called into doubt, Harding by a careful scrutiny of the complete range of evidence is able to validate those doubts and to pronounce with authority.

This is an important book for European prehistory. It settles quite definitively (using the evidence at present available) what has been one of the most lively controversies in European prehistory. It leaves the way open for more interesting explanations of what happened in Europe in terms of processes which were locally at work, and indeed takes some steps in that direction itself. With its clear presentation of the evidence and its good illustrations it should appeal to a far wider readership than the specialists who will first and most eagerly pounce upon it.

Colin Renfrew, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

In the World of Sumer: An Autobiography, by Samuel Noah Kramer. 255 pages, frontispiece, 29 black-and-white photographs, 1 text figure, 1 map. Wayne State University Press, Detroit, MI 1986 \$37.50

Samuel Noah Kramer's name will be well known to many readers of this magazine as the man who brought the Sumerians and their literature into the realm of general knowledge. That the Sumerians are now part of the standard fifth-grade curriculum in this country, whereas a generation ago they were known mostly to cuneiformists, is in large measure owed to his unremitting