

**Book-of-the-Mirror
For This Week**

Before Columbus

Kelemen's Great 'Medieval American Art'

Reviewed By
Charles A. Wagner

FEW know it, but an almost undiscovered world of art lay hidden in the sands of the Americas before Columbus ever walked up the Caribbean beach sand to plant the flag of Spain on our soil.

Pal Kelemen, a Hungarian scholar, worked for 10 years on a compilation of American pre-Columbian art that would be all-inclusive and yet mean something to the average reader and student. His efforts have been crowned with unusual success and his two-volume *Medieval American Art* (Macmillan, \$22.50) is a gem of research, printing and presentation.

Indeed scholars who have the gift of making the complicated study of archaeology dramatic reading for the non-professional are as rare as edelweiss. In fact, that is a gift too few historians are blessed with. Yet Kelemen has it in abundance. He can actually make the dusts dance with life.

Here spread before you are riches out of a misty past that defy the imagination and set the mind marching into speculative realms that would have thrilled Poe and given him a hundred plots for new stories.

For the first time we find gathered together in one work the cultures and cultural outpourings of all the medieval peoples who lived here: gold masks of indescribable delicacy; stone carvings with the curious lines of Egyptian relief clearly portrayed. Where then the bridge from Africa?

Pottery, untold wealths of clay scrawls and whirls. Think Dali something bizarre? Take a look at some of these Mayan molds. Think Disney had a brand new idea? We refer you to drawings of crickets and painted ladies, ducks and deer more graceful than Donald and Bambi—prehistoric relics.

Yes, the aborigines were not the savages we have always pictured them, and can no longer do so. In the pueblo country of our own Southwest lived the earliest Americans of them all—the basket makers. Geographically, the five chief areas of pre-Columbian America all existed in high altitudes. Perhaps that accounts for preservation of these examples of their art. It may also mean that there were earlier cultures somewhere in the valleys—too long buried now for recapture.

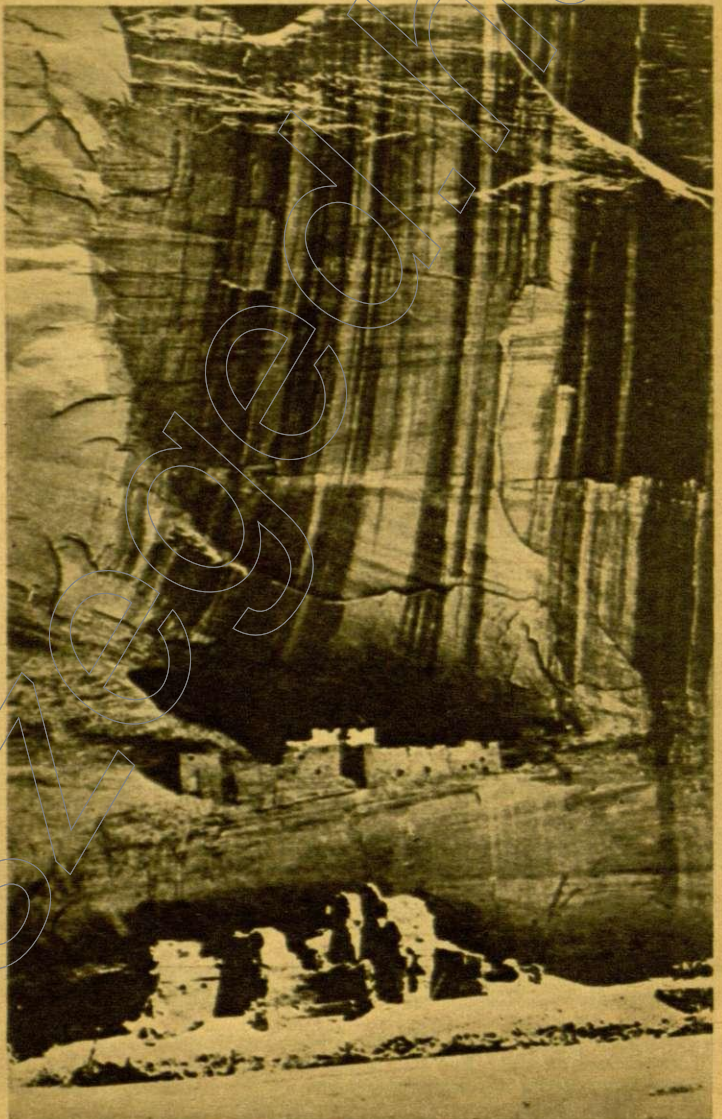
Mr. Kelemen says that it is

ing nothing of civilized traits, such as domestication of cattle, cultivation of rice or the use of wheel or plow. They had to start from scratch, to put it archaeologically. They had to build their own civilization and art.

When the Spaniards dashed onto these shores, large areas of the American continents were therefore already inhabited, and well entrenched. Says Kelemen

Although in north and east North Africa and in east and central South America the scale of living was still relatively primitive, certain areas—a broad band stretching from the Southwest to northern Chile—ranked high in the lasting character of their architecture and other arts.

The five chief areas of true development had the true loom



Canyon de Chelly in Arizona, showing the White House, remains of incredible Southwest Area medieval American architecture, still sturdy, habitable.



Maya maize-god, Copan, Honduras, is a remarkably modern-looking piece of sculpture. Note grace of turned hands.

section, the States between the Mayan and Andean areas: Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Panama and Colombia. The fifth, or Andean Area includes Peru and sections of Bolivia, Chile and Argentina.

Their art is unfolded here in picture and text with a lavish simplicity that deserves immediate acclaim.



This solid gold mask of ruler Xipe-Totec was found in a tomb at Monte Alban.



Not a pre-Columbian Babe Ruth. That "bat" is probably a spear. Piece represents pottery of the Mexican area.

—Illustrations from "Medieval American Art" by Pal Kelemen (Macmillan)

in use. First was the Southwest, comprising the region covered by Utah, Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico. The second was the Mexican area, from the Rio Grande southward through Vera Cruz and Oaxaca. The third, the Maya area, covers the eastern section of Mexico, British Honduras, Guatemala, and parts of Honduras and El Salvador.

The author gives the name of Interlying Area to the fourth

almost impossible to calculate the riches that have probably disappeared from the pre-Columbian scene, because the buildings which served the rites of pagan gods were destroyed as a righteous act. We know that the hand-written books of the Mayas, Zapotecs and Aztecs were burned by the first priests as works of the devil.

It has been generally agreed that our part of the world was first settled by migrants who came across from Asia through the Bering Sea, carry-