

Did the idea about the Asian origin of the American “Indians”^{*} develop from 16th century Spanish political geography?

Aleš Hrdlička’s (1869–1943) reception of the Spanish Jesuit José de Acosta’s (ca. 1540–1600) conjecture about an Asian origin of the first American “Indians”

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Abstract: 16th century Spanish cartographic and literary landbridge concepts, which connected America to Asia or depicted America and Asia as one united huge land mass, had the political function of declaring America as well as Asia as Spanish territories, but also to exclude other European claims on America (Gemegah 1999: 131). These geographic fictions were also based on religious reasons. As neither the American continent nor its inhabitants are mentioned in the Bible, America had to be declared a part of the Old World and the inhabitants of the New World therefore could only have arrived from the Old World – as Adam’s descendants. This was the reason why from the very beginning an autochthonous origin was strictly excluded, as admitting an autochthonous origin would signify – in the understanding of the 16th century – that the first Americans did not belong to mankind.

After losing their political functions, some elements of the invented geographic concepts have survived, leaving strong impacts on the research into the origin of the American “Indians”. The Spanish Jesuit José de Acosta (Acosta 1590) declared a fictitious land bridge as the only means for the peopling of the Americas. He further pretended that not only the first human inhabitants but also the animals of the American continent had come from the Old World to the New walking in several migrations over a land connection.

Although Acosta’s concepts have developed from political and religious issues, they are still accepted in the research into the peopling of the Americas. The fact is neglected that it was not the question about the First Americans’ origin which was important to the authors of the 16th century but rather the problem how to explain the existence of mankind on a ‘non-existing’ continent. Acosta’s fiction had impacts on generations of scientists – among them Alexander von

^{*}The term American “Indians” is written in quotation marks to draw attention to the fact that it goes back to the Spanish tradition to label America as “Indias”. This tradition, however, served political purposes, in order to declare America as part of the Asian “Indias”: Depicting Asia on American maps would make Asia a Spanish possession [Gemegah 1999]. The term American “Indians” only remains from Spanish colonial strategies which deprived the inhabitants of the Americas of their real identity and history.

Humboldt and Franz Boas. The presentation of Acosta's work at the 17th International Congress of Americanists in 1910 caused an uncritical revival of Acosta's concepts, especially by Aleš Hrdlička. Now the question remains to what extent Acosta's ideas have obstructed alternative research and whether they will be allowed to influence the present and future research into the peopling of the Americas.

Keywords: Spanish claims on Asia, 16th century cartography, land bridge concepts, José de Acosta, Asian origin of American "Indians", Alexander von Humboldt, Franz Boas, Aleš Hrdlička

16th century's maps and José de Acosta's conjecture

The development of the idea of an Asian origin of all First American "Indians" and its reception have not yet been critically examined. Rereading the conjecture of the Spanish Jesuit José de Acosta about the origin of the Native Americans, however (Acosta 1590), shows that this concept has developed from political dogmas of the 16th century. Is it possible that Spanish and Habsburg political geography, being the main message of Acosta's ideas, still have influence on modern sciences?

When Columbus arrived in the so-called New World, at first no one thought that its inhabitants originated on other continents. This idea developed when Spain, in rivalry with Portugal, declared Asia as Spanish territory by means of the Line of Demarcation, resulting from the *Bula Intercaetera* and the *Contract of Tordesillas*. The *Bula Intercaetera* seemed to place Asia within Portuguese possessions. However, if America was cartographically connected to Asia, then Asia would also form part of the territories west of the Demarcation Line in the Atlantic Ocean, which belonged to Spain (Gemegah 1999: 106; 2000: 50th ICA, REG-5).

Spanish and Habsburg maps show America and Asia united as one huge land mass or connected by land bridges. These land bridge concepts are thought to be the result of ignorance. But already in the early decades of the 16th century cartographers outside Spain had depicted America and Asia as separate continents. Therefore the maps with land connections between Asia and America gain a new significance.

The cartographic land bridges took different forms. The map of Bartolomeo Colón, ca. 1521 (Bagrow, L: 1985 History of Cartography, Chicago, Fig. 28/Zorzi) shows one of the first land connections from the Caribbean to the Asian continent (Gemegah 1999: 96; plate 8).

On the map of Caspar Vopel, 1542 (Wissenschaftlicher Ausschuss des Komités für die Amerika-Feier (ed.): "Hamburgische Festschrift zur Erinnerung an die Entdeckung Amerika's", Volume I, Hamburg, 1892, Tafel I) America and Asia can be seen united on a broad land mass (Gemegah 1999: 96; plate 9). The North Pacific is omitted. The names *Asia Orientalis* and *Cathay* (China) are written near *Hispania Nova*, showing China and Mexico not only as neighbors, but as situated in the same area. Only with this background and these maps can Acosta's

fictions about the migrations of the American "Indians" from "Indias" (Asia) to America be understood.

On such a land mass the ancestors of the American "Indians" were not supposed to migrate from one continent to another, but to walk around on "Spanish Amerasia". However, when later all maps showed America and Asia as separate continents, the idea of the fictitious "Asian" origin had already multiplied, being established as common "knowledge", with the result that the idea of an "Amerasian" origin turned into an "external Asian" origin.

Also on seemingly realistic cartography, the concept of "Amerasia" can be found. Here it took the form of a small land connection in the North Pacific, with Asian names, like *Asia Orientalis*, *Cathay* or *Mangi* appearing on the North American continent. This is the case with Van den Putte's map of 1570 (Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, [W(3)]), (Gemegah 1999: 100; Plate 10, 11). This narrow land connection was a compromise between the expanded land bridges and the realistic cartography. The small land connection still served as a path on which the supposed ancestors of the American "Indians" could "walk" from Asia to America. And – a nice little detail on this map – the Habsburg emperor Charles V can be seen on his throne in the Atlantic Ocean, regarding his united "Amerasian" territory. He was of the opinion that the continents America and Asia were not separated by an ocean, but were connected, and that therefore the Western territory extended as far as to China, thus bringing China within the Spanish territory (Dreyer-Eimbcke 1991: 261).

When Acosta wrote about a supposed Asian origin of the American "Indians", the Spanish land bridge concept had already existed more than 50 years in cartography and literature. Bartolomé de las Casas first considered America and Asia as separate continents, but later he declared America as part of Asia (O'Gorman 1967: CLXVI), which gives new insights into Spanish censorship.

Interestingly it was one of Acosta's colleagues, the famous Jesuit Matteo Ricci, who issued a beautiful realistic world map (Ricci 1590), based on previous Portuguese maps, showing that a water strait separated Asia from America, and that no one could walk through these waters (Gemegah 1999: 90; Plate 5-7). Philip II was well informed about the realistic cartography (Gemegah 1999: 124, 128). His knowledge clearly contradicted the fictitious land bridge maps. Outside Spain there was less censorship on cartography and only there it was possible to publish realistic cartography.

Acosta has always been regarded as an authority in questions concerning the New World. This is undoubtedly justified for most parts of his work. His statements about the origin of the American "Indians", *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias* (Sevilla 1590, book I, chapters 16-25), however, mainly served to propagate the idea of the land connection between America and Asia and it was an instrument for Spanish territorial claims. In order to put more emphasis on the land bridge concept Acosta strictly denied settlements of the Americas by seafaring peoples thus preventing claims on the Americas by other European countries, which already might have reached the New World.

Another interesting part of Acosta's writings are his comments of 1587 on the plans of a Spanish conquest of China (A.R.S.I., Jap/Sin. 126, 15r-29v). These comments show Acosta's role within different approaches towards China, re-

flecting the respective ambitions of Spain and Portugal or the Jesuits in Rome. Acosta found himself between the Spanish interests and those of the Jesuits in Rome (Gemegah 1999: 199). In his statements regarding plans to immediately attack China, Acosta does not abandon the idea of a *conquista* of China, but he suggests to postpone it into the future and recommends a gradual Spanish military build-up in Asia. Thus involved in political and military strategies and writing his statements in Mexico from where Spanish Asia, i.e. the Philippines were governed, it is obvious that Acosta knew that America is no part of Asia.

Acosta translated his original Latin version (Acosta 1584) into the Spanish (Acosta 1590) language. His *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias* was also published in English, German, Dutch, French and other languages. His ideas about the peopling of the Americas became part of the European education system. In the 20th century a great number of new editions have been published, among them (Mateos 1954, O’Gorman 1962 and Alcina Franch 1987).

When the fictitious land bridges were replaced by the realistic cartography and after Acosta’s conjecture had lost its political function, his concepts might have remained a simple footnote of the 16th century’s history, if it were not for the following ideas:

- Concept of a land bridge between Asia and America,
- ‘External’ origin of all American “Indians”,
- Asia as place of origin,
- Exclusion of settlement by seafaring peoples,
- Several migrations,
- Late settlement of the Americas.

These statements still belong to the generally accepted concept for the research into the origin of the American “Indians”. But taking into consideration that Acosta’s arguments neither had an empiric, scientific basis, nor were they really meant to seriously deal with the question of the origin of the American “Indians”, serving only as a vehicle for political strategies, a closer look at how they were meant by Acosta and how they are used today, is necessary:

Concept of a land bridge between Asia and America

The land bridge concept is the main message of Acosta’s concepts, as it was important to reconsider Spanish and Portuguese claims on Asia after the Union of the Crowns in 1580.

With the distribution of realistic cartography and the subsequent loss of the fictitious landbridge, however, it became more and more difficult to find a suitable “path” on which the idea of the walking “immigrants” could be applied to. Therefore each island discovered in the North Pacific, and each new piece of information about the geological changes in that region have been considered for their suitability for any kind of migration – instead of doubting the concept, asking whether possible regional contacts in the Northern Hemisphere really did affect the whole American continent, or looking for alternatives.

External origin of all American “Indians”

The idea of an external origin results from the political cartography. When Acosta wrote that all “Indians” came walking from Asia to America he presented the Mexican Navatlaca as an example. The Navatlaca would have been surprised to learn that they had arrived in Mexico walking from Asia! With the invention of such migration concepts the future dogma about the Asian origin of all American “Indians” was born, although the realistic cartography showing a water strait between America and Asia and the coastal lines of East Asia and Western America was known.

But not even after the worldwide acceptance of the realistic cartography was the “Amerasian” origin doubted. It turned into an “external” origin, instead, which still dominates the research into the peopling of the Americas. Unfortunately, sometimes there is more attention paid to the question whether the inhabitants of other continents are “suitable” as ancestors of the First Americans!

Asia as supposed place of origin

In many scientific fields Acosta’s conjecture of an Asian origin is accepted without doubts. But if one looks at some very bizarre side effects of his concepts, it is astonishing for how long such ideas were accepted as facts. Parts of the fiction had already been mentioned during the decades before Acosta, for example when Asian names appeared on maps of North America. Furthermore the Aztec ruler *Moctezuma* was given the Asian respectively Mongolian title “Khan”, which originally belongs to *Djingis Khan*. Also the fact that America was named “Indias” is a result of the territorial rivalry between Spain and Portugal about Asian India. The tradition to describe America as Asia or part of Asia has falsified our knowledge about Asia and America.

Nevertheless many scientists of later centuries, like the Physical Anthropologist Aleš Hrdlička, never doubted that all early inhabitants of the Americas had come from Asia. Hrdlička had undertaken journeys in America and Asia (Glenn (Ed.) Montgomery R.L. 1996: 2–3) in order to prove Acosta’s conjecture. Hrdlička’s activities created an “Acosta-Renaissance” which has grown during the last 50 years as the following few examples show: (Martinez del Rio 1952: 15,23; Mateos 1954: XXXIX; Jarcho in: Isis 1959: 430; O’Gorman (Ed.) 1962; Hopkins (Ed.) 1967: 3; Melon in: Estudios Geográficos, 1977: 261; Alcina Franch 1985: 64-65,76; 1987: 24; Fiedel 1992: 2,39).

Exclusion of settlement by seafaring peoples

Acosta not only denied contacts between America and other continents by seafaring peoples, in order to prevent possible claims on the American continent by non-Spanish countries, but he also suggested that animals arrived in America walking over the land connection. Zoologists, dealing with the peopling of the Americas, however, no longer mention Acosta’s fiction – the idea of tropical animals walking through the icy landscapes of the northern “land bridge” is

too bizarre.¹ Only in the research of the human settlement of the Americas is Acosta still cited.

Several migrations

Acosta wrote that the early “immigrants” entered the American continent in several migrations. He referred to the history of the above mentioned Navatlaca. According to their own history, the Navatlaca-groups, like the Suchimilcos, Chalcas, Tepanecas, Culhua, Tlatluícas arrived in Mexico in several migrations. Acosta, however, placed this American history on the Asian continent. (Mateos 1954: 209). Today’s discussions about one or several migrations should be considered within this historical context. Sometimes elements of Acosta’s concepts are added to concepts of modern research and the extent of the impact, but also the misinterpretation of Acosta’s fictions become obvious:

“...most researchers working on the origin of American Indians continue to hold the view first presented by Acosta: that living and past peoples of the New World are derived from late Pleistocene populations of East Asia” (Powell – Neves 1999:154).

Acosta would not refer to late Pleistocene populations of East Asia, as this term was unknown to him. Acosta took the year 820 as the beginning of the Navatlacas’ migrations (Mateos 1954: 209). There is no doubt that there have been regional contacts in the Northern Hemisphere, but these can not be used as a condition for the peopling of the whole American continent.

Late settlement of the Americas

For Acosta, author of the 16th century, the peopling of the World and thus of the Americas could only take place very late compared to those large periods of time of many thousands of years to which we are used to today. He wrote, as already mentioned, that the Navatlacas commenced to leave their lands in the year 820. It then took them 80 years to get to the place which they now inhabit, which is Mexico (Mateos 1954: 209). Looking at the landbridge fictions, eighty years seem quite “reasonable”, considering that China was often depicted close to Mexico.

Today the question about the time of the first settlement of the Americas belongs to one of the greatest scientific disputes. “The antiquity of human occupation south of Alaska has been hotly debated for decades. Many authorities see little or no compelling evidence for human presence before 12-11 ky ago, while others point to sites where stone artifacts or other humanly modified objects may be much older. However, most such sites are highly problematic” (Klein 2000: 562).

These 12-11,000 years are in contrast to earlier dates, which also had been considered possible until 1907. Since then the research regarding early American

¹Some extinct animals, among them the Mesosaurus, are found in both Africa and America. Their presence in two different continents is explained by the continental drift. So at least the early animals of the American continent did not have to “walk” via the Northern Hemisphere, as Acosta had pretended.

settlements has developed in an exceptional way. Often time-limits are previously set, even before empirical investigations or excavations are performed. This, however, is a rather contraproductive approach to study early settlements of any given continent.

It was especially Hrdlička, who rejected early finds (Hrdlička 1907: 15), among them also Folsom (Meltzer 1993: 54). Hrdlička's denial of the possibility of early American settlements should already have been critically examined in 1927 after the discovery of Folsom. But Hrdlička's influence on the research into the peopling of the Americas had then grown enormously. Many supposed ancient remains found in the United States, in Canada or in South America were sent to him for investigation and most of these had no chance. Some of the remains analyzed by Hrdlička can still be found in various museums. A new investigation, especially regarding the age of some remains might bring new insights.

Aleš Hrdlička and the 17th International Congress of Americanists 1910 in Buenos Aires and Mexico

But why are Acosta's ideas still dominant? What do they have to do with an International Congress of Americanists? What have political Habsburg strategies to do with Physical Anthropology? This question leads to the reception of Acosta's conjecture in the research into the origin of the American "Indians".

Many discrepancies in Acosta's migration concepts have never been doubted. They have been repeated for generations by authors and scientists, like the ethnologist Franz Boas. In his introduction to the Jesup North Pacific Expedition he wrote that

"The expedition has for its object the investigation of the tribes, present and past, of the coasts of the North Pacific Ocean... founded on the fact that here the Old World and the New come into close contact. The geographical conditions favor migration along the coast-line, and exchange of culture. Have such migrations, has such exchange of culture, taken place?" (Boas 1898).

This expedition, if limited to the Northern hemisphere and its regional cultural contacts, was a worthwhile undertaking. If however, its results were used as a stepping stone for the research into the peopling of the whole American continent, then it would put in practice Acosta's concept. It also shows that, at the beginning of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition, the idea of migrations from Asia to America was part of theoretic discussions and vague imaginations, resulting from Acosta's concepts. No attempt had previously been made neither in Asia nor in the Americas to independently study empirical data. Alexander von Humboldt and Franz Boas are two examples of numerous authors referring to Acosta's concepts, although it seems as if Alexander von Humboldt at certain times doubted the migration concept (Gemegah 2004: 107).

Similarities between the inhabitants of North America and North Asia had to be expected even without Acosta's writings, as the investigated areas belong to a more or less homogenous region. Due to the pre-existing convictions, however,

such local contacts are misunderstood as a proof for the peopling of the whole American continent from Asia. And, consequently, all ancient remains in the Americas are seen in the light of this idea and many scientists followed Acosta.

With this background, the eager engagement of Hrdlička to prove this concept and to do research in Asia and America is understandable. But the lack of evidence in Acosta's concepts demands a re-interpretation of the chain of reception.

I therefore present this problem here, at the 50th International Congress of Americanists, in the session ANT-10, Physical Anthropology of the Americas, inviting you to a travel in time back to 1910, to another International Congress of Americanists, which was the 17th ICA in Buenos Aires and Mexico. There Hrdlička participated as delegate of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (17th ICA, B.A. Reseña 1912: 24). He presented "*Artificial Deformations on the Human Skull with special reference to America*" (17th ICA, B.A. Reseña 1912: 101, 147).

Another delegate sent by the Smithsonian Institution to the 17th ICA was Rev. Charles Warren Currier (17th ICA, B.A., Reseña 1912: 24). Currier presented the history of the Jesuits in Peru (17th ICA, B.A. Reseña 1912: 610) introducing Acosta's *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias* which contains the fictitious migration concept.

Thus, after centuries, the remains of 16th century's outdated political strategies were revived, re-enforcing the idea of an Asian origin. Acosta's misleading concepts and the conclusions and interpretations drawn from it served as arguments against Florentino Ameghino's "*La industria lítica del homo pampaeus*". Most scientists who had accepted Acosta's conjecture were convinced that local migrations in the Bering Strait region had caused the peopling of the whole American continent. They could therefore not tolerate older remains in South America, as these would contradict the supposed limited time frame for the beginning of migrations.

Acosta's ideas had survived by means of scientific contacts between European and American countries. At the International Congresses of Americanists scientific achievements have been presented, but also old convictions – true or false – have been reconfirmed. It should be considered that some of the International Congresses of Americanists were held in towns which had been under strong Habsburg influence, like Madrid 1881, Huelva 1892, Mexico 1895 and Vienna 1908. The International Congresses of Americanists were not only of interest for scientists, but also for the general public seeking information regarding the Americas.²

But also in the United States Acosta's *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias* was known very early. The American President Thomas Jefferson mentioned that "Great question has arisen from whence came those aboriginal inhabitants of America" (Jefferson: 1787: 162). Jefferson bought a copy of Acosta's *Historia*

²In the proceedings of the 17th ICA in Buenos Aires I found – much to my surprise – the name and the address of the German writer Karl May (1842-1912): "May Karl, Schriftsteller; Radebeul, Dresden" (17th ICA, B.A. Reseña 1912: 43). Whether or not Karl May visited Buenos Aires will probably remain an open question, although a hotly debated one. Hrdlička was fluent in German due to his mother's German background (Spencer 1979: 17). It is not known, however, whether he had knowledge about May's narratives regarding the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

Natural y Moral de las Indias 1590 edition from Froullé in Paris on April 17, 1789, price 15” (Sowerby 1955: 254).

Hrdlička’s reception of Acosta’s conjectures probably might have been influenced by his European background and education. Before immigrating to the United States, Hrdlička had spent his childhood in the Habsburg town of Humpolec, where he received private lessons by a Jesuit teacher (Hrdlička Papers, NAA: Box 33, Spencer 1979: 21). In the United States Hrdlička’s conviction was reconfirmed by the already existing American Acosta reception. Therefore Hrdlička spent many years trying to prove Acosta’s concepts, firmly convinced that

A remarkably sensible opinion on the subject of the origin of the American Indians is met with as early as 1590 in the book of Padre Acosta, one of the best informed of the earlier authorities on America. (Hrdlička 1935: 2).

Hrdlička strictly rejected all remains contradicting the Acosta-concept. On May 18, 1910 Hrdlička writes about the events of the 17th ICA to Professor Holmes at the Smithsonian Institution:

...and now there comes also a German from Bolivia, Posnansky, an Engineer, with a man – from Tiahuanaco – “12,000 years” old, from 5 meters below the surface. And there are many many here who believe it all. Yet I hope to show them different, and to do so in such a way that they shall feel it was done by their friend. So far since nobody feels offended. Ameghino even went so far as to offer to go with us to some of the places, and to ask me to examine and report for him his last human finds – which however I thought best not to undertake (Hrdlička Papers, NAA: Box 107).

Apparently without having seen the places Ameghino wanted to have examined, Hrdlička “knew” that the finds had to be rejected. Even if at this occasion Hrdlička intended to present his opinion in a “friendly way”, later, however, with his growing authority, it was not easy to contradict him, as his successor at the Smithsonian Institution, Dr. T. Dale Stewart, reported about his work with Hrdlička (Ubelaker 2000: 275, 278).

Hrdlička later visited the places suggested by Ameghino. In 1912 Hrdlička published *Early Man in South America*. This book, however, was one of the reasons that research regarding an earlier human presence in South America was abandoned, as had already happened before in North America after Hrdlička had published *Skeletal Remains suggesting or attributed to early Man in North America* in 1907.

The 19th International Congress of Americanists took place in Washington in December 1915. There Hrdlička was Secretary General and his influence and role in questions regarding the peopling of the Americas was steadily increasing. Due to his strong Acosta-mind-set, however, Hrdlička continued to reject research initiatives different from his own convictions. An open discussion about an earlier presence of mankind in America was no longer possible.

Hrdlička's concept of the peopling of the world and thus of America was furthermore based on his conviction that Europe was the cradle of humanity. "The initial extension into Asia, Hrdlička said, commenced somewhere around 25,000 years ago" (Spencer 1979: 509).³ According to this, there were only 25,000 years available to cross the whole Asian continent and then there was just a little time left for mankind, to "walk" into the Americas.

Acosta's insistence on an Asian origin of all First Americans later not only had impacts on Physical Anthropology, but also on ethnology and history of arts. A Chinese delegate to the 17th International Congress of Americanists, Prince Chang Yiu Tang, found complete similarity between the altars of the pyramid of Teotihuacán and the altars of the Temple of Heaven near Peking (17th ICA Mexico, Reseña 1912: 34). These buildings have nothing at all in common, therefore this example shows how far Acosta's concepts had multiplied.

Conclusion and Perspectives

Recently new investigations have been initiated, claiming Europe, Africa or other places as origin for the American "Indians". They question the following parts of Acosta's conjecture: The land bridge as the only possibility to people the Americas, the statements about Asia as only place of origin and the denial of contacts by seafaring peoples.

But what happens with the remaining parts of Acosta's conjecture? The following statements are still alive:

- The dogma of an external origin of all First Americans
- The dogma of several migrations from Asia to America
- The dogma of a late settlement of the Americas

External origin

All new approaches and alternatives still take an external origin of all inhabitants of the Americas for granted. But, as shown above, the idea of the external origin was invented in the 16th century and it has directly developed from Acosta's work. Acosta's conjecture was the reason that the American continent has always been investigated with the constant obligatory look for passable routes in Beringia. Many remains have been rejected because their supposed age was contradictory to geographical conditions in Beringia.

The understanding of Acosta's work and its influence therefore can not be complete without a critical re-interpretation. It not only would be worthwhile to re-examine this crucial element of Acosta's conjecture for possible alternatives, but also to compare and/or combine the results with the current approaches. Very old finds in South America, like the artefacts in Itaboraí [Prous 2000:

³This limited frame of time might also have led to Hrdlička's rejection of Sinanthropus, which becomes obvious in his correspondence with Davidson Black, one of the discoverers of Peking Man (Hrdlička Papers, Box 14). (Gemegah 2004: 105-114)

35], contradictory to the traditional, Acosta/Hrdlička based concepts, should be given a chance and perhaps a new and surprising picture is waiting for us.⁴

Several migrations

Acosta’s statement that America was peopled by several migrations has developed out of political necessity and it is a plagiarism of the Navatlaca’s history. Today the idea of several migrations serves to explain the variety of human populations in the Americas. Without sticking to Acosta’s conjecture, however, and admitting new alternatives, the discussions about several or one migration are no longer necessary. Even if the question as to whether there have been several migrations or only one in the northern hemisphere is answered, this would not necessarily explain the peopling of the rest of the continent.

Without Acosta’s concepts the peoples and cultures in the Far North of America and Asia could be regarded as more or less independent ones connected by trade contacts. The idea that parts of the Far North or the American Pacific coastal line served as a one-way-(racing-) route from Asia to America could finally be filed with other historical curiosities.

The age of the earliest settlements of the Americas

The age of the earliest settlements of the Americas is the most controversial aspect of the whole matter. Acosta mentioned 80 years for the peopling of Mexico. Compared to that, Hrdlička’s 25,000 years for the peopling of both Asia and America, seemed to be revolutionary. Hrdlička, however, could not even accept Folsom (Meltzer 1993: 54) and, after he did, the “conservative” clock for the settlement of the Americas was stopped at more or less 11,500 years for the earliest populations of the Americas, although numerous, more ancient, dates have been, and keep springing up in both North and South America which can not be explained by the Acosta/Hrdlička-concept.

Many finds have been rejected because of the Acosta/Hrdlička-dogma. They might have led to further discoveries, allowing a more complete understanding of the peopling of the Americas, but, unfortunately they are now missing in the mosaic. Today’s heated disputes show that a satisfactory answer is still far away and that the question of the peopling of the Americas has reached a blind alley.

Therefore, as long as the question of the earliest presence of humankind on the American continent has not been answered, no other continent should be considered as place of origin. It is recommendable to open our minds to alternatives, to get rid of outdated concepts and to permit new questions regarding the peopling of the Americas.

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⁴It is interesting that mainly in countries with less Spanish and Acostan influence, like Brazil, that early remains have been found – and accepted. This does not mean that very old remains are only to be found in Brazil. A closer look at the literature and the discussions of the past decades reveals that early finds can be expected at numerous places in the Americas.

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