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**Reviews Joel W. Palka, *Unconquered Lacandon Maya: Ethnohistory and Archaeology of Indigenous Culture Change* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), pp. xxi+318, \$65.00, hb.**

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different plan, and similarities in plan can cross-cut differences in emic dimension. Some *otoots* appear to have served as residences, and one interesting group marks out space used by women, but the inference that individuals slept or resided in such spaces rests on plans and such features as frequent additions and changes to rooms, rather than recovered artefacts. This is because the Maya kept their buildings swept clean and were not in the habit, until cities fell into decay, of throwing refuse near living space.

Why, then, did the Maya label such structures as *otoot* or ‘dwelling’? At Yaxchilan it appears that *otoots* were noble dwellings in the sense that they were places for the nobilities’ actions, but were not necessarily residential. Was the primary ethos of an *otoot* to designate, in Plank’s terms, interior spaces as places for the care and feeding of gods or deified ancestors? Even when living individuals are associated with a building in the texts, as in the case of the elite women of Yaxchilan, the concept of ‘dwelling’ seems to apply to something other than a residence. Plank offers the phrase ‘god dwelling’ for some of the cases. If I understand her argument, the theme common to *otoots* seems to be that they embody space delineated or marked through the act of construction and the placing of inscriptions on what is built. Rulers and other elites who entered such spaces did not experience daily activities as they would in unmarked space, but rather in a charged dimension with ‘otherworld’ overlap. This did not mean that people carried out rituals incessantly but, as in a monastery, it established that certain kinds of actions or communications or thoughts were possible here as part of daily life that were not possible – or not as effective – in other sorts of spaces, perhaps even including what we call ‘temples’, which may have been the sacred space of specialists.

Other issues covered by Plank include the idea that glyphs embody ritual speech, the differences between *otoot* and *naab*, and the involvement of women with *otoot* architecture, to name but a few. As I have noted, the volume is most likely to be attractive to archaeologists, historians or anthropologists who are interested in the relationship between excavated structures and Maya emic classifications, but epigraphers should appreciate the compilation and discussion of the range of texts on the *otoots* and their interpretation, as well as the integration with archaeological correlates. For archaeologists, interpretations of the *otoot*-related inscriptions assembled in this work can inform further excavation and interpretation of features. For epigraphers, the variety of structures subsumed by the term *otoot* will surely contribute to an understanding of the meaning and significance of the concept.

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Joel W. Palka, *Unconquered Lacandon Maya: Ethnohistory and Archaeology of Indigenous Culture Change* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), pp. xxi + 318, \$65.00, hb.

The Lacandon Maya of the lowland rainforests of Chiapas and Peten never accepted Christianity, and remained outside the sphere of direct Spanish influence and authority. As a result, they have held huge interest for Maya researchers. Palka’s invaluable study, in addition to introducing a wealth of information and insights, is an

important methodological contribution to Lacandon studies and indeed to Maya and indigenous studies in general. Palka's focus is culture change and its complexity. Although the term 'Lacandon' seems to reflect a single group, he documents important variations among synchronic Lacandon groups as well as diachronic cultural change.

Palka debunks the popular myth that the Lacandon Maya were one of the least changed post-Conquest groups. For anyone familiar with Maya history, it is hard to imagine how anyone – except perhaps for Mel Gibson – could see the Lacandon as a direct reflection of the Maya past. Classic and Postclassic Maya imagery, texts and material remains describe a literate people richly attired in colourful woven textiles, living in houses in groups on well built platforms surrounded by gardens and a variety of carefully tended fields, with access to products from the far reaches of Mesoamerica. The Lacandon seem to have survived by keeping material culture simple and contact with non-Lacandon to a minimum. They are perhaps the most and not the least changed of Maya groups.

As Palka observes, 'their culture evolved in the Colonial period and was subsequently shaped during the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries' (p. 277). It is this post-Colonial epoch among the Maya that is least studied and little known, and Palka's research fills admirably large gaps in this regard. He clarifies that much of what we think of as Lacandon practices developed in the nineteenth century after the formation of the new Republics, and as the result of interaction with outsiders. Examples provided are the visitation rituals necessary to enter a Lacandon settlement, the significance of machetes, and the rise of a deity named 'Akyantho', the deity of foreigners, disease and commerce (p. 283).

The first chapter describes the Lacandon as they attracted world attention in the early 20th century. Palka characterises the Lacandon as tribal and contrasts their dispersed settlement with the Maya who were concentrated by the Spaniards in towns. He then describes his own research, which covers historic sources and explorers' accounts as well as descriptions of Lacandon material culture, ethnographic research, and archaeological excavation. Chapter two discusses how the Lacandon have been depicted, the predominant view being that they were descendants of Classic civilization. Also in this chapter, the author expands his characterisation of the Lacandon as a tribal-level society by pointing to their sparse and scattered populations, segmented lineages and informal leaders. Chapter three discusses the setting of the modern or 'ethnographic' Lacandon, and deals with the changes wrought in the 1980s. Chapter four presents evidence for the multiple cultural origins and ethnogenesis of the Lacandon during the early to mid-1700s. Their roots probably lie with several Colonial-period southern lowland Maya groups, none of them 'tribal'. What differentiates Lacandon from the colonial Maya and what provided the commonality later expressed by outsiders as 'Lacandon', was their refusal to remain under colonial rule and to practice Christianity.

Chapter five describes Lacandon settlements, villages and demography. Chapters six and seven focus on the material culture of the historic Lacandon as revealed through excavation. The drawings and photographs are clear and the material well presented. It was surprising to learn that a large percentage of imported items were recovered. Palka mentions that the earthenware ceramics were either from England or the United States, but I wonder if any of this material (such as Fig. 7.28, a bowl with a floral pattern I recognise) could have come through Belize with its British colonial connections. Chapters eight, nine and ten deal with

transformations and transitions in Lacandon economy, material culture, social life and religion.

The final chapter provides an insightful synthesis and summary. Three main themes are highlighted. First, that the Lacandon were able to preserve their autonomy and, although never totally isolated, had control of their territory. Second, that contact with outsiders was generally not sustained so that interaction was of relatively short duration; and third, perhaps most importantly, that the Lacandon were affected as much by interaction with other Maya groups as with Europeans. Palka also goes on to compare culture change in some Amazonian societies with the Lacandon case.

I take issue with a few points, although they are matters for further discussion rather than negative criticism. Palka states in the final chapter that conquest and acculturation in colonial Maya populations are well represented in archaeological and historical research (p. 280). Conquest and acculturation may be well represented in historical research in some areas, but in archaeology, particularly in the Maya lowlands, such research is in its infancy. The author also states that interaction between neighbouring indigenous people in the lowlands is not given adequate attention in the Maya area (p. 282). I agree that interaction among indigenous groups deserves attention, but I do not share the perception that such interaction is given inadequate attention. Although we can rarely be specific about ethnic affiliation, site-based archaeologists tend to think in terms of Maya communities and Maya community interaction, and this is as true of the colonial as it is for the Classic period. The research of Grant D. Jones (*Maya Resistance to Spanish Rule*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989, and especially *The Conquest of the Last Maya Kingdom*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) is about this very interaction, particularly the role of the Peten Lakes Maya in nurturing resistance and rebellion by manipulating other Maya groups. There is also the caveat that studying interaction is best grounded in knowledge of how the Maya self-identified, and we are woefully deficient in this regard. The term 'Lacandon' itself originates in Spanish and not Maya usage (p. 74).

As noted earlier, Palka describes the Lacandon as a small-scale tribal group and compares them to groups in South America. Such a comparison is valid, as Palka makes clear, through the perspective of colonial history. That is, the tribal people he speaks of are not 'people-without-history' but people whom history has ravaged. Although Palka describes this history, it seems to me that he could make so much more of his conclusion, and might consider doing so in future publication. It is earth-shattering to comprehend that people would prefer to 'devolve' and live under conditions in which they might often have to shift location, avoid large settlements, and strictly regulate contact with 'the other' in order to survive. Our normal brush with the word 'tribe' is an evolutionary one – purportedly an organisational step on the rise to complex society. That people would *choose* to reject settled life in larger, hierarchical and organised communities – as the people who became the Lacandon must have done – says a good deal about the horror of the times. As Palka points out, many groups chose this route as against living with the enemy. Anthropologically, choice is not a factor that is often considered in social evolutionary scenarios, but perhaps the Lacandon have something to teach us all.

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