

Foreword

Joel Palka's study of the transformation of a modern Maya people, titled *Unconquered Lacandon Maya: Ethnohistory and Archaeology of Indigenous Culture Change*, significantly expands the offerings of our Maya Studies series. We believe that this book on the Lacandon Maya helps bridge the gap among the disciplines of ethnohistory, archaeology, and ethnography by clearly showing the value of a conjunctive approach in Maya studies. The following pages emphasize the importance of viewing cultural variability from a non-static standpoint; Palka's work succinctly illustrates the difficulty in assuming that the Lacandon (or any other Maya group) are a crisp mirror to the past or a direct link to the ancient Maya. The volume documents significant variations among co-existing groups of Lacandon as well as changes in Lacandon culture within the last 300 years. It underscores the importance of demonstrating, as opposed to assuming, the existence of similarities and differences among both coeval and non-contemporary peoples. Lacandon society was neither static nor unchanging; deviations and modifications to "traditional" culture were instituted within Lacandon society over time depending upon circumstances and contexts. Because the experiences of geographically distinct Lacandon groups were different within the frontier "tribal zone" that they occupied, variations and dissimilarities also arose among contemporary Lacandon groups.

Unconquered Lacandon Maya also is notable for focusing on a group of Maya that occupied peripheral, largely unpopulated areas. Far from being reflective of the densely settled and highly structured landscape of the Classic Period Maya lowlands, the Lacandon instead represent small "tribal" societies scattered over a huge expanse of unoccupied jungle—a by-product of both colonial intervention and modern nation building. The largely remote locations of historic Lacandon settlements were generally outside the reach of colonial control and concern. Thus, historic Lacandon communities are distinct in many ways from other groups of modern Maya, who—although vastly changed by colonial policies—had continuously occupied residences, lived in densely settled communities, and were in more direct (and often continuous) contact with non-Maya peoples. By focusing on the Lacandon, Palka helps to inform us about broader changes that were faced by other Maya groups, but often with different results. His focus on non-Contact Period historic Maya archaeology also deserves mention. While historic and ethnohistoric research is not unheard of in the Maya area, much of the archaeological work on the Maya has focused on the period immediately following European contact; most true historical archaeology has focused not on strictly Maya settlements, but rather on colonial remains. In contrast, Palka uses a direct historic approach to follow ethnographically known Lacandon from the

present back in time into the colonial era. Archaeology is used as a tool to flesh out their missing past and to examine their cultural adaptations—all within the historic era. Palka's study presents both Lacandon material culture and interpretations of change that will be of value to all researchers seeking to understand the range of Maya cultural adaptations. This volume further provides useful data for a temporal horizon that is largely unknown in the southern Maya lowlands.

In sum, *Unconquered Lacandon Maya* demonstrates the potential of conjunctive research among the Lacandon and other Maya groups. It also shows how the Lacandon fit into broader cultural patterns known for other displaced groups from other parts of the New World. We are pleased to include this important work in the Maya Studies series.

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