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UCLA Historical Journal

Title

Matthew Restall. *The Maya World: Yucatec Culture and Society, 1550-1850*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5gn8v60d>

Journal

UCLA Historical Journal, 18(0)

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Publication Date

1999

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Matthew Restall. *The Maya World: Yucatec Culture and Society, 1550-1850*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

This book follows in the wake of major advances in the field of ethnohistory, led by James Lockhart and his groundbreaking work on the Nahuas of central Mexico. Restall's impressive monograph, initiated as a UCLA doctoral dissertation under Lockhart's direction, is the latest contribution to a growing corpus of ethnohistorical research based upon indigenous-language sources, in this case a sophisticated analysis of indigenous society and culture in the Yucatan province during the colonial and early-national periods. Part of a recent trend in Latin American ethnohistory termed New Philology, this study emphasizes the close reading and precise linguistic analysis of changes in terminology and phrases occurring in mundane native-language records. The application of this methodology has led to a dramatic reinterpretation of the social and cultural history of indigenous peoples under Spanish colonialism.

Previous historical representations of the Yucatec Maya have relied on Spanish-language sources, generated largely by and for the church and state. These works had the undesired, but unavoidable, result of objectifying the indigenous inhabitants. Restall sidesteps the documentary pitfalls that hindered earlier historians and effectively emancipates the Maya from the biases of Spanish sources by basing his study on 1,600 notarial records produced by the Maya in their own language. Herein lies one of his major achievements. These records, conceived as Spanish categories, include: "petitions, wills, records of testimony, election records, receipts, bills of sale, titles, agreements, and ratifications" (236). Not only did the Maya easily adopt the Roman alphabet, an indication of familiarity with record-keeping dating from preconquest times, but they also were able to appropriate Spanish forms of documentation for their own purposes.

By studying the Maya through their own words as subjects in their own history, Restall reveals a very different picture of indigenous life than has been previously known. Despite the initial decimation of the Maya, wrought by the violence of man and imported disease, Maya life during the colonial period reflects a high degree of cultural continuity amid the processes of selective and qualified adaptation to Spanish institutions. Far from being reduced to dysfunctionality, a view mirrored in the perception of Spanish priests, the Maya acted with a high degree of autonomy, one of the major

goals of which was to defend the material interests of the community against outsiders. These activities range from the legal defense of lands against Spanish encroachers, especially during the late-colonial period, to the submission of formal complaints regarding abusive behavior by Spanish priests.

Restall introduces the Yucatec Maya world through the *cah*, "the fundamental unit of Maya society and culture" (13). Here we immediately see the focus of the book: continuity, adaptation, and change of the basic indigenous sociopolitical structure under Spanish colonialism. The *cah*, like the *altepetl* of the Nahuas, has its origins in the preconquest period. After the arrival of the Spaniards, the *cah* became the foundation of the *encomienda*, parish, and indigenous municipality and town. That these institutions rested on preconquest indigenous structures is not unexpected, but Restall's work does illuminate significant similarities and differences between the Maya and the Nahuas. For instance, the *cah* lacked anything like the Nahuas' *calpolli*, the integral subunit of the *altepetl*. And, while in central Mexico the *encomienda* lasted less than a century, in Yucatan it persisted for over 200 years. Maya self-identity was based upon the *cah* and the *chibal*, a patronymic-based social grouping which continued from the preconquest period uninterrupted past independence. The perception of a shared ethnic identity outside of the *cah* appears only in the nineteenth century.

The book is divided into four parts: "Identity and Organization," "Society and Culture," "Land and Material Culture," and "Literacy and Language." Since all documents used in this study were produced by the *cah*, Restall is able to investigate the Maya view of local politics and government, class, sexuality, inheritance, gender, daily life, religion, land tenure and exchange, and material culture. Part four of the book offers a detailed analysis of the different writing genres employed by the Maya and linguistic evolution reflected therein. Changes in language depended upon contact with Spaniards and hispanized people; therefore it is not at all surprising that in the case of Yucatan, with its disproportionately small number of resident Spaniards, changes in the Maya language evolved more slowly than that of Nahuatl in central Mexico.

The chapters presented in this book generally represent broad categories, and, it must be said, not all topics are as fully explored as the reader might hope. The treatment of sexuality, for example, is not as comprehensive as the chapter's title might suggest, nor could it be, as its

discussion is limited by the nature of the documentary base. But this is a minor complaint: Restall goes as far as the evidence will allow. There is some overlapping of different subjects. Gender, for instance, is treated as a separate chapter, yet the subject falls into discussions in the chapters devoted to land tenure, inheritance, and sexuality; but this, too, is unavoidable given the book's approach. Readers looking for explicitly political or theoretical interpretations of Maya responses to Spanish colonialism will not be wholly satisfied. However the text does provide plenty of examples that lend themselves to such readings. After Bishop Diego de Landa's burning of codices during the mid-sixteenth century, to cite one example, the Maya took up writing with fervor. Clearly, writing itself has seldom been a more politically motivated act.

Restall's monograph is a valuable contribution to Mexican historiography. It gives voice to the indigenous people of the Yucatan province and effectively renders the Maya subjects in their own history. The book reflects the application of an innovative methodology, applied for the first time to documents produced by the Yucatec Maya. It includes original terminology, one of the benefits of this approach. And it adds itself to the now established field-wide trend of discarding the limiting constraint of traditional periodization. By including a comparative component to the analysis, juxtaposing his own study of the Yucatec Maya with Lockhart's work on the Nahuas and also Kevin Terraciano's study of the Mixtec, Restall contributes to the telling of the larger story of indigenous responses to Spanish colonialism.

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