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McGee, R. Jon. *Life, Ritual, and Religion Among the Lacandon Maya*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1990, pp. xiii + 158.

Anthropologist R. Jon McGee's work on the Lacandon Maya of Eastern Chiapas (identified by Julian Stewart as part of the "Western Maya" region) reflects the changing emphases of a new generation of ethnographers. On the surface, this book appears to be a standard ethnography--the study of one particular religious ceremony (the *balche*) the understanding of which McGee takes to provide "deep insight" into Lacandon beliefs in general. Here, the author shows his real mettle as an ethnographer. But this work is important because it employs a post-positivist perspective which moves beyond the functionalist's concern with the material components of culture to the meaning attached to these, an approach best exemplified in the work of Clifford Geertz and Johannes Wilbert. In addition, this work contains a number of unusual (for an anthropologist) observations about the impact of modernization on traditional societies.

The core of this work resides in a series of chapters comprising an analysis of the *balche* ritual in this group whom the author holds to be one of the few remaining non-Christian Indian groups in Mexico. McGee follows Johannes Wilbert's work with the Warao of Venezuela by contending that cultures are best studied from a holistic approach in which a part of the whole is examined in order to understand the entire nature of the whole. Wilbert analyzed the cultural complex of canoe-making. McGee focuses on the religious ritual of making and consuming the sacred drink, *balche*. McGee's thesis holds that the *balche* ceremony stands as a model for Lacandon ritual action in that it symbolizes a larger set of interrelated cosmological beliefs. Thus, understanding this one rite provides deep insight into Lacandon religious beliefs in general.

To his credit, McGee disagrees with many of his more grey-haired colleagues in analyzing the impact of modernization on the Lacandon. For example, with regard to the influence of tourism on these Indians, McGee notes that participation by the Lacandon in the tourist trade generates money used in supplementing a meager horticultural lifestyle. He maintains that the tourist trade, "gives these small-scale farmers subsistence flexibility in the face of environmental uncertainty and provides a valuable supplement to a house-

hold's income without detracting from traditional subsistence activities." (42)

The author also disagrees with certain "romantic-minded anthropologists" who bemoan the imminent demise of Lacandon culture and point to the degradation of the environment by the Mexican lumber and petroleum industries as an analogy for a process of cultural disintegration. He suggests that other anthropologists rely too heavily on the perspectives of their informants in assuming that Lacandon culture will die with its elders. Instead, McGee sees a natural process of acculturation and adaptation. He points to social and economic factors providing incentives for younger men to maintain traditional Lacandon culture. Rather than the helpless pawns overwhelmed by outside forces as depicted in the popular media, McGee sees the Lacandon engaging in a pragmatic response to Mexican culture by assimilating the outside world to fit their own lives and meet their own purposes.

A weakness of this work is the result of the author's attempt to augment the traditional participant-observation methodology with the ethnohistorian's analysis of documentary evidence. He argues that the contemporary Lacandon society can best be understood from an ethnohistorical perspective. This work is not a true ethnohistory. The documentary evidence on the Lacandon is too scanty to attempt any more than some reasonable guesses as to the origins of this particular group of the Maya. This is precisely what McGee attempts to accomplish in a chapter dedicated to disproving the commonly held notion that the Lacandon are descendants of the Maya who built the temples at Palenque and Yaxchilan. Instead, he interprets the historical record in such a way as to lend credence to his theory of a Yucatecan origin. Fleeing from the Spaniard's conquest of the Yucatan, the Lacandon are to have migrated to Chiapas in the mid-seventeenth century. Why the Lacandon were not decimated by the same diseases which struck the groups whose vacated lands they occupied remains unanswered.

The author's treatment of the documentary evidence perpetuates the Black Legend. To support his theory of Yucatecan origin, McGee recites the familiar litany of conquistador atrocities and subsequent Inquisitorial brutality, speculating that these may have caused the flight of a group who migrated south to Chiapas. He apparently does not realize that after the battles of conquest, Spanish interests were better served by cultivating Indian labor and tribute.

Clerical punishment of Indians came under attack in the second and third generations after conquest in Central Mexico because clergy were thought to be intruding upon the prerogatives of royal authority. Nevertheless, McGee's perspective provides a provocative interpretation of the historical record which albeit, fails to fully justify his theory of Yucatecan origin.

This book is important principally for its contribution to a new type of anthropology. While maintaining the rigorous ethnographic standards of the functionalists in answering the question "how," the author adds the search for meaning in pursuit of the question "why." In addition, he challenges the assumptions of many anthropologists regarding the impact of modernization on traditional societies. This work is most speculative in its attempt to trace the origins of the Lacandon Maya. Perhaps this is simply the reflection of the scarcity of documentary sources on the Lacandon. At any rate, McGee's ambitions to incorporate an ethnohistorical element fall short at this point.

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Ida Altman. *Emigrants and Society. Extremadura and Spanish America in the Sixteenth Century.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989. 372 pp.

The focus of this book is really narrower than that of its billing, Extremadura and Spanish America in the Sixteenth Century. It is based half upon Altman's 1981 doctoral dissertation on "Emigrants, Returnees and Society in Sixteenth Century Cáceres" (Johns Hopkins University), some of which ironically does not make it to the book, and half upon Altman's return to the Spanish archives in 1984 and 1987 to add Trujillo to the study. The book therefore does not deal with other important extremeño cities such as Alcantará, Badajoz and Mérida. There is also a late-century emphasis, apparently determined by source availability. This localization of focus actually strengthens the work, allowing for detailed examples and sparing the reader the dehumanization of the exclusively statistical approach.

As a social history of Cáceres and Trujillo this work