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Lost Shores, Forgotten Peoples: Spanish Explorations of the South East Mayan Lowlands

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Lost Shores, Forgotten Peoples: Spanish Explorations of the South East Mayan Lowlands. Edited and translated by LAWRENCE H. FELDMAN. *Chronicles of the New World Encounter; Latin America in Translation/En Traducción/Em Tradução.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2000. Illustrations. Maps. Appendixes. Notes. Index. xxiv, 269 pp. Cloth, \$54.95. Paper, \$18.95.

This book is a collection of Spanish documents in translation, mostly from the seventeenth century, regarding the Spanish conquest of the southeast Maya lowlands, and in particular the Manchu Chol people. Geographically, this region comprises the drainage of the Usumacintla River in northern Guatemala and southern Belize and, according to Feldman it is, historiographically, a neglected area—a condition he hopes to rectify with this volume. The Spanish conquest of this region began in 1574 but was not completed until the late seventeenth century, when the Manche Chol were congregated into mission villages. The documents tell the story of this conquest in the words of Spanish, but not Maya, actors. Unlike the Maya to the south or the Nahuatl speakers of central Mexico, the Manchu Chol never committed their history to paper nor, according to the editor, produced any other documents either in their own language or in Spanish. Still, there is much here to interest both the novice historian and the specialist.

Feldman has selected documents by Spaniards who participated in the conquest of the Manchu Chol over the course of more than a century. They include four Spanish governors, a scribe, a notary public, two Spanish military men, one parish priest, and Fernando de Altamirano y Velasco, the captain general of Guatemala from 1654 to 1657. Over half are accounts by Dominican missionaries, whose order had charge of the conversion of the natives in this region beginning in the sixteenth century. Feldman's choice of documents reflects his view of the Spanish conquest of the Maya as an exciting adventure in an exotic land rather than as a tragedy for the inhabitants or as an encounter between different cultures. The account of Martin Tovilla, who arrived in the Verapaz region to assume his duties as governor in 1630, is a particularly vivid example of this point of view. Tovilla describes his voyage from Spain to America, which he clearly enjoyed, in a lively account of daily life aboard ship during a seventeenth-century ocean crossing. Tovilla was interested in everything he saw, and his account of his first weeks in the New World reveal a man of a sympathetic, inquisitive intelligence. His descriptions of New World natives, flora, and fauna seem to be a preview of Enlightenment mentality. In later documents, however, Tovilla casually describes torturing some natives, and he published laws providing for the brutal exploitation of the Indians under his jurisdiction. The accounts of the Dominican missionaries' travels in the lowland forests and villages are also presented as adventure stories in which missionaries confront both friendly and unfriendly natives, English pirates, and forbidding rain forests with difficult terrain. However, because missionaries worked directly with the natives, the missionary accounts reveal more about native life and also occasionally give a sense of the native perception of events.

The Dominicans preceded the Spanish military and royal presence in the region, arriving the seventeenth century. The arrival of royal governors beginning in 1628 began a period of raids by the unconquered Itza, a revolt by the pacified Manche, and the abandonment of native villages. Exactly why these events occurred is not explained in this volume. Later documents recount the eventual reconquest of the Manche territory

and the congregation of these people into mission villages. Readers familiar with the Spanish Conquest in America will note how the patterns of conquest in the Maya lowlands differed little from the conquest in other areas. In this respect, this volume would be a useful introduction to the conquest in general as seen through the eyes of the Spanish participants. These documents also complement Matthew Restall's translations of sixteenth and seventeenth Maya (although not Manche) documents regarding the conquest in his Maya Conquistador. This volume joins the editor's two previous monographs on the history of the southeast Maya lowlands in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

This book provides the specialist information on the Manchu Chol previously unavailable in print, and is therefore an important addition to the documentation on the Maya in translation. It provides no new information on the general pattern of native reactions to conquest but would be useful to undergraduates and general readers desiring an introduction to the general themes of the Spanish Conquest in America, and the conquest of the Maya.

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