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UCLA Historical Journal

Title

Inga Clendinnen. *Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517-1570*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. xiii + 245 pp. (Cambridge Latin American Studies, 61)

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7z92291m>

Journal

UCLA Historical Journal, 9(0)

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Publication Date

1989

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Inga Clendinnen. *Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517-1570*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. xiii + 245 pp. (Cambridge Latin American Studies, 61)

That this book is elegantly written and eminently readable may be its greatest strength and weakness, the former because it is to date the most useful synthesis of sixteenth-century Yucatan from the Spanish perspective, and the latter because fascinating theory and expert prose tempt the reader to expect a significant new scholarship that never fully materializes.

Like the first part of Nelson Reed's *The Caste War of Yucatan* (Stanford: Stanford University press, 1964), the equally well-written study of a later century in Yucatan's history of racial/cultural conflict, *Ambivalent Conquests* is divided into two sections. In both these books the first half dealing with the war from the Spanish perspective, is longer and more convincing than the second half, which attempts to analyze the Mayan viewpoint. One of the prime reasons for this weakness is the authors' apparent ignorance of the Yucatec maya language.

Clendinnen's account of the initial discovery and assault upon the peninsula by Spaniards builds upon Robert Chamberlain's classic narrative of 1948, *The Conquest and Colonization of Yucatan* (Washington: Carnegie Institution), emphasizing the sense of frustration and disillusionment symbolized in the elder Montejo's lament to the King in 1534: "No gold had been discovered, or is there anything from which advantage can be gained" (p.29).

The rise and fall of the Spanish expectation that Yucatan would produce another Tenochtitlan is no new discovery, and Clendinnen's account of the conquest period (1517-1562) relies heavily on the work of Chamberlain and that of Robert Ricard. It is in her partial reappraisal of the Ricardian apologia for the Franciscans in New Spain that Clendinnen's study reaps some original thought. The book, dedicated to the late

France V. Scholes, whose massive incomplete biography of Diego De Landa the author mentions (and may have seen what existed of an MS), becomes largely about Landa and his feuding with other Spaniards, most notably Francisco de Toral, Landa's predecessor as Bishop of Yucatan.

Herein lies a fine interpretation of divergent visions of a Christianized Yucatan. Clendinnen presents a cruel side to Landa that compliments the Pacheco Cruz mural of Landa in Merida, but contradicts the mild scholarly Landa of *Relacion*. Clendinnen's theorizing is laudable, but she never fully reconciles the author of this encyclopedic study of the Maya, with the author of a policy of systematic torture and indiscriminate persecution of the Maya. Clendinnen has given us a powerful and useful description of the 1560s campaign to break the back of Maya culture once and for all, an account based largely upon articles of hers published in 1982 that dealt with the Inquisition and what she terms "Missionary Violence."

The second half of the book, a mere sixty pages devoted to the Maya point of view, contains the greatest potential, but it becomes an extension of Clendinnen's fascination with Diego de Landa. The author continues to make an insufficiently skeptical use of the chronology written several generations later by the Franciscan Lopez de Cogolludo, and she relies heavily on the classic France Scholes and Eleanor Adams study, *Don Diego Quijada, Alcalde Mayor de Yucatan, 1561-1565* (Mexico: Editorial Porrúa, 1938).

Clendinnen's brief review of the colonial Maya literature known as *The Books of Chilam Balam* is a succinct and inspired synthesis of our failure, so far, to understand these books. There are some tantalizing hints at new theoretical interpretation, but in the end the author's case rests on Michael Coe's analysis: the *Chilam Balam* are "fundamentally wierd" (p. 135).

Clearly what is needed here is a more thorough look at Maya-language sources — Clendinnen appears to read no Yucatec Maya at all — such as the municipal records of Yucatecan communities, some of which are available to scholars. Clendinnen might have benefitted from Nancy Farriss' *Maya Society under Colonial Rule: The Collective Enterprise of Survival* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), which Clendinnen says "appeared too late for me to profit from it" p. 228., yet Farriss also appears to have an ineffective understanding of Yucatec Maya and also relies heavily on Spanish (especially ecclesiastical) sources.

Clendinnen concludes that what characterized Spanish-Maya contact most was a lack of mutual understanding. Although undoubtedly true, this conclusion may also be a reflection of how far our understanding of pre- and post-contact Maya society has to go. This book does not take us as far as it might have, but its theories, synthesis and accessibility make it a worthwhile contribution nevertheless.

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Mark Nathan Cohen. *Health and the Rise of Civilization*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989. x + 285 pp.

With the dangers of environmental catastrophe becoming more apparent everyday, increasing scholarly attention has been paid to humanity's long standing ecological difficulties. Connections between scarcity of food resources, transformations in social organization, and changing patterns of disease have led a growing number of scholars representing a diversity of fields to revise previous assumptions related to the so-called rise of civilization. The process gained momentum in the 1960s with a group of anthropologists claiming that contrary to the barbarian stereotype of hunters and gatherers, this earliest form of human organization was actually the original "affluent" society. From the revisionist perspective it was civilization that was somehow aberrant in this behavior and detrimental to subtle ecological relationships.

In light of these revised assumptions about civilization and its presumed march towards progress, Mark Nathan Cohen has written a book that attempts to address questions concerning changes in the quality of life for humans, historic and prehistoric. Specifically, Cohen's interest is how changes in human behavior wrought by transformations in social organization have affected human health. Cohen uses a broad stroke to demonstrate how all forms of human organization are intricately bound by overriding ecological considerations. The transition from hunting and gathering to sedentary agriculture is an acute expression of human depletions of formerly abundant big game food supplies. Cohen shows how the Neolithic revolution, which led to the repeated rise of civilization