

Although Offner rejects externally derived theories, he analyzes Texcocan law using the framework of Leopold Pospisil, derived from German “legal science.” The bibliography lists only four other books in legal anthropology, all classics, the most recent of which was published in 1958. Offner argues that preconquest Texcocan jurists developed a system exhibiting “legalism,” the philosophy that abstract rules, expressions of the legislator’s will rather than of custom or morality, are the sole manifestation and source of law (p. 66). “Legalism” is a rare feature, according to Pospisil, who found it only in Roman law and the civil law systems descended from it, and in Ch’in Dynasty China (221–206 B.C.).

Offner portrays Texcocan society as containing a multiplicity of “legal systems,” arranged hierarchically, corresponding to functioning subgroups. In discussing lower legal levels, he focuses on the *calpulli* (“ward”). He uses documentary evidence on the composition and organization of *calpullis*, a componential analysis of Aztec kinship terms, and evidence of residence patterns, to argue that the *calpulli* was not a descent group, but a state organized political subdivision.

The strength of Offner’s book lies in its close examination of texts. And like all worthwhile books, it does not close down arguments, but rather opens them up. Offner may find no evidence of class struggle or of strong kinship groups. Others, however, may wonder why Texcocan law prescribed the death penalty for such human peccadillos as adultery and drunkenness. Is this the sign of a state that enjoyed uncontested control?

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COLONIAL AND INDEPENDENCE PERIODS

Maya Society under Colonial Rule: The Collective Enterprise of Survival. By NANCY M. FARRISS. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984. Maps. Notes. Illustrations. Tables. Figures. Appendixes. Glossary. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xii, 585. Cloth. \$60.00. Paper. \$19.50.

This is nothing less than the most extensive and most ambitious study of a colonial Mesoamerican Indian society to appear since the publication of Charles Gibson’s *The Aztecs under Spanish Rule* in 1964. Inspired in equal measure by both anthropology and history, *Maya Society under Colonial Rule* is a “historical ethnography” (p. ix) that attempts to portray the whole of Maya existence in rural Yucatán during the colonial period. In the preface, Nancy Farriss establishes three goals for the volume: (1) to relate the ecology and economy of the colonial Maya to their social organization and belief system; (2) to examine the effects of

the Spanish conquest from the viewpoint of the colonized; and (3) to relate the Maya example to issues concerning the nature of complex agrarian societies, especially those under colonial rule. Considering the inherent limitations in the archival source materials, all these objectives are well met, especially the first. Few aspects of life are left uncovered, the main topics consisting of the economy, demography and population movements, family and kinship, social stratification, community structure, political organization, and religion. The emphasis throughout is on the regional distinctiveness of Yucatán vis-à-vis central Mexico and Peru. The impact of Spanish colonial institutions and policies is studied from the bottom up—i.e., from the perspective of what took place in Maya communities. Grounded in a prodigious amount of archival material, this is a major work that considerably advances not only our knowledge of the Yucatec Maya, but of colonial Mesoamerica in general.

The overall picture is one in which the effects of Spanish colonization are relatively mild, with little disruption of traditional village life until the late eighteenth century. A constant theme is the persistence of pre-Hispanic institutions and cultural patterns in colonial garb; and it appears that the Yucatec Maya were able to preserve more of their indigenous cultural heritage than most other Mesoamerican Indian groups. Many changes that occurred in just a few decades after the conquest in central Mexico were stretched out over centuries in Yucatán, yet it is clear that the postconquest history of this region is much more than a case of “retarded development.” As the author shows so well, the social structures and processes of change in Yucatán were often different from those in other parts of the colony. The chapters on the Maya elite and religion—particularly the role of the *cofradías*—are especially good and provide a rich body of data that can be compared with findings from other regions.

The concluding part of the book deals with the far-reaching effects of the Bourbon reforms in the late colonial period. After 250 years of “indirect rule” in which villages were largely independent entities, the Maya were subjected to a crash program of modernization. They lost most of the judicial autonomy they once possessed, saw their public finances (the *cajas de comunidad* and *cofradías*) usurped by the Spanish, and suffered through an expansion of the hacienda system, which took much of their land. Farriss argues that in many ways this “second conquest” was more devastating for the Maya than the first, resulting in a “neo-colonial era” of increased Indian assimilation that extended well into the nineteenth century.

Its breadth, thoroughness, abundant documentation, and ethnological sophistication all make this book a resounding success. It is a landmark study that no student of the Maya or colonial Mesoamerica can afford to ignore.

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