

OUTLINE OF A DESCRIPTIVE ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE CHOLTI-LACANDON MAYA OF THE
SETTLEMENT OF SAC BALAM (NUESTRA SEÑORA DE LOS DOLORES DE LACANDON),
CHIAPAS, MEXICO
1694-1715

Research in progress based on unpublished 17th century manuscripts in the
Archivo General de Indias, Sevilla and the Archivo General de Centro
America.

Nicholas M. Hellmuth, 1971

During short periods of 1968, 1969, and 1970 I have undertaken
research in the Guatemalan archives. During the summer of 1971 I spent 6
weeks in Spain working at the Archivo General de Indias. To date I have
located at least 4000 unpublished manuscript pages which cover the
Spanish conquest, pacification, and eventual abandonment of the Cholti-
Lacandón region of lowland Chiapas, 1694 to 1715.

I am currently involved in research on non-related archaeological
problems for the Tikal iconography project of Dr. George Kubler and on my
own Yaxha Project mapping and excavations and have not been able to
process all the ethnohistorical information I have gathered on the
Cholti-Lacandón. It will not be until at least fall 1972 before I can
again work on ethno history; in the meantime I would at least like to
outline the things I am working on.

One of several goals of my Lacandón studies is to provide a sample
ethnography of a 17th century Maya lowland people to draw attention to
the great quantity of useful ethnographic information which is readily
available in the archives. My next step is to prepare sample ethnography
of a typical town of the Petén Ytza, of the Covoh, of the Quejache, of
the Toquegua, of the Verapaz Chol, of the Maya Chontal, of the Mopan, and
of the Chorti. The next step is to undertake a comparative study of
regional specialization and variation. All too often the Southern Maya
lowlands are thought of as a uniform topographical and cultural region.

It is my belief that productive ethnographic analogies may be drawn
between the various 16th-17th century southern lowland Maya and the
Classic period Maya of the same region. I feel that there was as much
regional diversity among the different parts of the southern lowlands
during the Classic period as there certainly was during the 16th century.
I would like to offer alternatives to the misuse of Landa's information
on the distant 16th century Maya peoples of Yucatan and to the continued
unwarranted projection of Yucatan Maya data back on the Maya of
Guatemala. I would also like to suggest that the 20th century Maya of
Zinacantan are not really a totally similar culture to use as models for
the Classic Maya of the Petén.

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The need and usefulness of information on the 17th century lowland
Maya.
- B. My personal interest in the Lacandonos stemming from my visits to
the Lacandón region in 1963, 1964, and 1970.
- C. Problems about the origin of the Yucateco-Lacandón of today
- D. My archival research to date.
- E. How a study of Sac Balam fits in with my overall research goals.

II. PUBLISHED SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON SAC BALAM AND THE SPANISH CONQUEST

- A. Villagutierre
- B. Ximenez
- C. Other early Spanish historians.

- D. 19th-20th century writers.
- E. Agustín Estrada's recent work on Sac Balam.

III. MANUSCRIPT SOURCES ON SAC BALAM

- A. Archivo General de Centro América
- B. Church archives in Guatemala City.
- C. Other archives in Guatemala.
- D. Archivo General de Indias, Sevilla, Spain.
 - i. The 500 page relación of Valenzuela.
- E. Other Spanish archives.
- F. European, North American, and Latin American archives with documents of Sac Balam

IV. HISTORY OF THE SPANISH CONTACT WITH THE CHOLTI-LACANDONES

- A. Cortes, 1525
- B. Other 16th century entradas
- C. Other 17th century entradas

V. THE FINAL CONQUEST AND PACIFICATION OF SAC BALAM

- A. The three entradas of 1695
- B. The establishment of a Spanish garrison.
- C. The provisioning of Sac Balam from the highlands.

VI. THE ABANDONMENT OF LOS DOLORES BY THE SPANISH, 1712-1715

- A. Reasons for the abandonment.
- B. Resettlement of the Lacandones first in the highlands near Huehuetenango.
- C. Final resettlement of the survivors near the Pacific coast.

VII. LOCATION OF SAC BALAM

- A. Summary of all previous attempts to locate Sac Balam.
- B. The actual location of Sac Balam as determined from new manuscripts.
- C. The route taken by the 1695 entradas as known from new information.
- D. The general location of the other Lacandón settlements.

VIII. REGIONAL SETTLEMENT PATTERN

- A. Overall view of the Lacandón region.
- B. Lacandón preferences for settlement locations.

IX. VILLAGE LAYOUT

- A. General layout
- B. Positioning of the ceremonial buildings.

X. TOPOGRAPHICAL SITUATION OF SAC BALAM

- A. River system
- B. Lakes
- C. Position relative to natural resources.

XI. NATURAL RESOURCES OF THE VICINITY OF SAC BALAM

- A. Subsistence resources.
- B. Resources of building material.
- C. Local resource for artifact manufacture.

XII. SUBSISTENCE ECONOMY

- A. Agricultural technique
 - i. Division of agricultural labor.
 - ii. Tools used.
 - iii. Growing seasons.
 - iv. Rituals for crop raising.

- B. Agriculture in garden plots next to the village houses
- C. Agriculture in milpas distant from village.
 - i. crops raised.
 - ii. Milpa huts
- D. Tree fruits and nuts
 - i. wild
 - ii. cultivated
- E. Gathering of wild plants.
- F. Subsistence from the (fresh) water
 - i. fish
 - ii. shellfish
 - iii. turtles
 - iv. other things
- G. Hunting
 - i. technique (weapons, etc.)
 - ii. fowl
 - iii. rodents and small game
 - iv. deer, tapir, and other large game.
- H. Domestic animals
- I. Land ownership
- J. Cholti terms for aspects of the subsistence economy from the "Moran" vocabulary.
- K. Unlikelihood that the Maya relied on "maize-beans-and-squash"
- L. Importance of root crops and tree fruits and nuts (but not ramon)
- M. Reasons for the shift to the present day dependence on maize and beans.
 - i. Spanish destruction of orchards
 - ii. Spanish food preferences.
 - iii. Ease of transporting and storing maize and beans.
 - iv. Spanish agricultural edicts.

XIII. ARCHITECTURE

- A. Domestic architecture.
- B. Interior design and furnishings.
 - i. kitchen
 - ii. sleeping areas
- C. Distinct features of religious architecture.
- D. Distinct features of milpa huts.

XIV. ARCHITECTURE OF THE THREE BUILDINGS OF THE SAC BALAM COMMUNAL CENTER

- A. The house for religious ceremonies.
- B. The interior courtyard.
- C. The other two buildings.
- D. Positioning and function, relevance for Classic Maya site plans.

XV. RELIGION

- A. Beliefs
- B. Deities
- C. The incensario ceremonies.
- D. The other ritual paraphernalia.
- E. Rituals, ceremonies, and other religious activity.
- F. Sacred places.

XVI. POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

- A. Regional political organization
- B. Political organization of each village.
- C. Relations between the people and their cacique
- D. Political vs. religious aspects of the caciques.

- XVII. DEMOGRAPHY
 - A. The censuses.
 - B. Birth rates.
 - C. Etc. general demographic topics.

- XVIII. KINSHIP AND MARRIAGE
 - A. Kinship terms.
 - B. Marriage patterns as reflected in the censuses.
 - C. "Incest" as seen in the censuses of marriage partners with the same name.
 - D. Courtship and marriage
 - E. The marriage ceremony
 - F. Married life.

- XIX. WOMEN IN CHOLTI SOCIETY
 - A. Information we can glean from the Spanish descriptions.

- XX. MEN IN CHOLTI SOCIETY
 - A. Information we can glean from the Spanish descriptions.

- XXI. WEAVING AND SEWING
 - A. General consideration.
 - B. Preparation of the material.
 - C. Weaving technique and instruments.
 - D. Terms for cloth, weaving, and sewing tools, etc. from the "Moran" vocabulary.

- XXII. ATTIRE
 - A. Male attire.
 - B. Female attire.
 - C. Body paint.
 - D. Ceremonial attire.
 - E. Bark cloth.
 - F. Non-cloth items of attire (source, procurement means, manufacture, etc.)

- XXIII. ARTIFACTS
 - A. General consideration.
 - B. Stone artifacts
 - C. Bone artifacts.
 - D. Metal artifacts (copper bells)
 - E. Wooden artifacts

- XXIV. WARFARE
 - A. Reasons for war.
 - B. The enemies (Ytza and Petenecte)
 - C. War attire.
 - D. Strategy

- XXV. ART
 - A. What little is known until excavation uncovers more artifacts.

- XXVI. TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATION
 - A. Trails, short distance
 - B. Trails, long distance
 - C. Water travel
 - i. canoe technology
 - ii. routes

XXVII. TRADE

- A. Medium of exchange.
- B. What the Lacandones needed.
- C. What the Lacandones had to sell.
- D. Trade routes.

XXVIII. LANGUAGE

- A. Relation on the Lacandón dialect to other Choloid dialects.
- B. The vocabulary of "Moran"
- C. The "arte" of Moran.

XXIX. LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE PERSONAL NAMES OF THE CHOLTI-LACANDON

- A. General analysis.
- B. Names shared with the Yucatec Maya
- C. Names shared with the Maya Chontal
- D. Names shared with other lowland Maya
- E. Names shared with highland Maya
- F. Nahua names.

XXX. PHYSICAL ANTHOPOLOGY OF THE CHOLTI-LACANDON

- A. Spanish descriptions of Cholti-Lacandon
- B. Archaeological retrieval of Cholti skeletal material.

XXXI. USE OF TOBACCO AMONG THE CHOLTI-LACANDON

- A. Raising of tobacco
- B. The newly found detailed descriptions of cigar manufacture in Valenzuela.
- C. Comparative comments on the use of tobacco among the Maya.

XXXII. MISCELLANEOUS ASPECTS OF CHOLTI CULTURE MENTIONED IN THE MANUSCRIPTS

- A. Counting
- B. Astronomy

XXXIII. SUMMARY

XXXIV. SIMILAR AMOUNTS OF ETHNOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ARE AVAILABLE FOR OTHER 16TH-17TH SOUTHERN LOWLAND MAYA SETTLEMENTS OF THE YTZA, COVOH, MOPAN, ETC.