

The Kowoj in Late Postclassic Peten, Guatemala. Identity, Migration and Geopolitics.

By Prudence M. Rice and Don S. Rice. Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2009. Pp. 458. \$65 cloth.

In 1994 Prudence Rice and her associates began a project on a people that ultimately were called the Kowoj. These were Maya, not Itza but close associates who inhabited the area to the north and peripherally to the east on the shores of Lake Peten Itza. They occupied this territory from Postclassic times down to the Spanish conquest in 1698.

The book gives a series of descriptions of the Kowoj from ritual, ethnohistorical, linguistic context plus a description of the archaeology at the Kowoj site of Zacpeten, the pottery of the Kowoj, and postclassic information on trade and finally on the interconnection with the Lacandon. The area covered in the immediately south of the Kowoj, the Peten Itza territory proper, some information on north/central Belize and detailed discussion of the interaction with the Yucatec Maya north and the Lacandon to the west of Lake Peten Itza. What the book lacks is a discussion of the area to the south of Lake Peten Itza. There is a reason for this. The people of this area were very distinct and seemingly hostile to the Itza (and the Kowoj). This is the area of the Manche and Mopan Maya.

"Manche Chol" included several different, but mostly closely related peoples. Going from west to east, was the Chol Lacandon in Chiapas. To the east of them, and on the other side of the Usumacintla river the people of the town of Xocmo. These were Yucatec and not Chol speakers. South of the Chol Lacandon, but on the Guatemalan side of the Usumacintla were the Acala Chol. The Acala were just beyond the Pocomchi and Kekchi settlements of the Verapaz. Further east, and immediately south of the Itza, were the Mopan who were settled in the 18th century at Dolores. And south of the Mopan were the Manche Chol proper. These included the inhabitants of what is now southern Belize as well as the area immediately to the west in Guatemala and consisted of the towns of Pusilha, Manche, Chocahu, Amatzin, Yol, Yaxha and Tzalac. Their neighbors to the south were still existing town of Kekchi Cahabon and the extinct Chol town of Xocoloc on Lake Izabal (Munguia). None of the people of this zone were discussed in this volume. Nor is it very surprising. In the "Manche Chol" area the orientation was to the people to the south not the north. And this book follows this Postclassic division.

I am going to follow the same division, looking at the northern lands from the viewpoint of the lands to the south. In other words looking at it from what was known in the 18th century as the Audiencia de Guatemala and not from the view of the Audiencia de Mexico. Looking at the coast of what is now Belize, the

distinction is very clear. At a point on the coast the indigenous language changes from Chol to Yucatec. The place is further north than expected for the town of Tzoite is Chol and Sibun is Yucatec. This is not southern Belize but central Belize. The area speaking Chol was at one time further north than expected.

Hofling (in the Kowoj) notes the presence of Chol lexicon in the language of the Mopan and suggests it is the most divergence of the Yucatec dialects. One can easily argue otherwise, that it is the the most divergent of Chol dialects. There are no studies of the Mopan to push either answer. Immediately to their south were the Manche Chol towns.

The Manche inhabitants proper, dispersed by Spanish conquistadors, seemingly were resettled in Kekchi and Pokom towns. On the Atlantic coast raids of English/Mosquito at the beginning of the 18th century caused the inhabitants to flee to the interior settlement of Gualan. The Acala were conquered and removed by the Spaniards to the highlands. Far to the west the Chol Lacandon became the Yucatec Lacandon when the former were conquered and removed to the Pacific coast. They were resettled at the Szinca community of Atiquipaque. Yucatec speakers came into the Lacandon soon after and became known, as they still are known, as Yucatec Lacandon.

In this way the southern Maya Lowlands, who are ignored in the Kowoj book, and who up to the 17th century were Chol, became inhabited by others who arrived after the Spanish Conquest. But please do not forget that the southern neighbors of the Itza were a people distinct who fought with the Itza and maintained their own independence in the shadow of the Itza state.

References for the Southern Most Lowland Maya

The primary citation is my book, *Lost Shores, Forgotten Peoples* that was edited and translated by myself and published by Duke University Press in 2000. It is based upon many primary sources, the most relevant is that of Tovilla who describes the Manche revolt and its attempted suppression in 1631. Salazar is important for his description of Manche in the 1620's. As noted in my volume, there are many other references. They end with a geographical description of the Peten, dating from 1765, that notes the abandoned lands that were once the core of the Manche Chol territory. My own studies are purely ethnohistorical and based upon the colonial documentation. The Manche area is a region that also deserves detailed archaeological study but this will depend upon others. The major primary sources include the following:

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