

instability and because the discovery of exploitable precious metals proved insufficient to prompt a more developed connection. With an even smaller internal market than neighboring states and having little success in developing new trade in the Pacific, Chile remained a relative backwater. The salience of the Chilean landed interest and the weaknesses of local liberal factions produced a conservative version of the independent Spanish American republics. As another indicator of its relatively marginal position, Chile appeared immune to the pronounced trade cycle of the 1820s that in more commercially developed Buenos Aires fostered an initially stronger British connection. Baeza Ruz distinguishes between British “state” and “non-state” interactions with Chile. The former included the short period following the death of William Pitt the Younger in 1806, when members of the 1806–7 Ministry of All the Talents endorsed plans for an invasion of Chile. In this period, British strategic planners sought ties between South America and the British East India Company, an avid purchaser of the American silver used in trade with China. Chile was thus seen as a potential component of the global mercantile empire linking Britain and India.

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Return to Ixil: Maya Society in an Eighteenth-Century Yucatec Town.

By MARK CHRISTENSEN and MATTHEW RESTALL. Louisville: University Press of Colorado, 2019. Photographs. Maps. Figures. Tables. Appendixes. Notes. Bibliography. Index. xiv, 302 pp. Cloth, \$76.00.

Testaments are a rich source for understanding the past. They can provide information on a wide range of topics such as religious beliefs and practices; political status; economic, household, and family relationships, including the distribution of property; marriage patterns; social roles; and feelings toward others. This also applies to the more than 100 wills from the small Mayan community of Ixil, in the northwest of the Yucatan peninsula in Mexico, which—supplemented by further archival material—form the essential source base for the interesting study *Return to Ixil*. Based on their own translation and detailed analysis of these documents written in Yucatec Maya, Mark Christensen and Matthew Restall reconstruct important aspects of the social history of the Yucatec Maya in the eighteenth century. Maya testaments are extremely rare in Yucatan. The period in which the Ixil testaments were written by Mayan scribes and notaries spans more than four decades (from 1738 to 1779). The testaments thus represent a particularly important corpus that allows the authors to draw conclusions about processes of social change. The book brings together source corpora discovered independently by each author. It complements and expands the results of Restall's 1995 study of Ixil testaments, *Life and Death in a Maya Community: The Ixil Testaments of the 1760s*.

Chapter 1 analyzes the role of the Mayan notaries, who mostly belonged to the indigenous nobility (*ahmehenob*). While the notaries composed the preambles, testators were responsible for the body of the will. Chapter 2 covers the role that native militias played in the defense of Yucatan against pirate attacks in the absence of a standing army

in New Spain until the end of the eighteenth century. The importance of Mayan militias in Ixil is evident in the wills both from the firearms inherited and from the military titles (*capitán*, *alférez*) held by a number of the persons mentioned. Since the testaments had to be signed by the entire indigenous town council (*cabildo*), they also reveal the families who determined the political life of Ixil and patterns of office rotation. Chapter 3 deals with the distribution of status and wealth. In fact, about three-quarters of the wills are of persons of noble status. Members of a small number of noble families not only ruled the town but also accumulated most of the wealth. Women could also inherit and bequeath property. Goods were mostly related to gender roles. While mainly men possessed forestland (*kax*) and tools to cultivate it, women owned objects associated with the house plots (*solares*) or their household activities. Chapter 4 examines the role of religion in the lives of Ixil's inhabitants. The authors draw not only on the wills, reports of episcopal inspections (*visitas*), and letters from priests but also on religious texts from the Chilam Balam of Ixil, a collection of texts presumably written outside the control of the Catholic authorities by the Maya themselves. Images of saints, which played a central role in indigenous religiosity, do not appear as personal possessions that were inherited before the 1760s. Chapter 5 focuses on local family and household structures. Although official decrees determined a largely equal distribution of the inheritance among the children, the testators in Ixil often followed their personal preferences—for example, by favoring certain children or excluding others. Spouses were relatively rarely considered in the wills. The documents also reveal that the noble families mainly married among themselves to strengthen their political, economic, and social ties. Even marriages within their own name group (*chibal*) were possible, and especially members of the largest and dominant noble family, the Pech, often married other Pech in Ixil.

Beyond the Ixil wills, only a few corpora of Maya testaments from the colonial period are known for the Yucatan peninsula (from Cacalchen, Tekanto, and Ebtun). Comparison with these proves the wills from Ixil to be particularly rich in content. It also shows parallels and significant differences between the four towns. Thus, similar household objects, clothing, land, and house plots were inherited everywhere, but in different quantities. Conclusions can be drawn about preferred economic activities, among other things. For example, beekeeping apparently played a lesser role in Ixil than in the other three towns. Economic growth and cultural change are reflected in the increasing quantity and variety of inherited household items (such as tables, beds, benches, dishes, and blankets) and tools.

While appendix A provides an overview of the documents used, appendix B includes the complete transcriptions in Yucatec Mayan and their translation into English. Thus not only does *Return to Ixil* offer a comprehensive documentation and translation of a source inventory that is important for the colonial history of Mesoamerica. It also is a meticulously researched social history of a smaller Mayan town that encourages further research and comparison.

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