



Milan Kováč – Tatiana Podolinská, LACANDÓNCI. Poslední praví Mayovia. (Lacandoneans. Last True Mayas.) Bratislava, Chronos, 2001, 99 pp.

An interesting book was published by the Section of Religion Studies of the Department of Ethnology, the Faculty of Philosophy of the Comenius University in Bratislava, at the Chronos publishing house, on the occasion of the opening of the exhibition *The World of Lacandonean Indians*. It is based especially on the fieldwork of both authors, realized from August 1999 to February 2000. Besides the reviewed publication, this fieldwork resulted also in a manuscript of a Lacandonean-Spanish dictionary.

The structure of the book is influenced by the needs of the exposition, which, however, does not diminish its quality in any way. The first chapter *Lacandoneans and Their World* gives an elementary historical-ethnographical picture in a geo-climatic frame of the contemporary Lacandoneans. The second chapter (*The Society and the Family*) deals with social relationships, religious ideas and images and their practical expression (initiation rituals, etc.). The third chapter (*Material Culture*) presents Lacandonean ceramics, the production of pumpkin vessels, weaving of lacandonean *xikul* garments, the production of *uh* necklaces, bows, arrows, etc. A great deal of attention is devoted also to *Cuisine and Diet* in chapter 4, including also several original recipes for traditional Lacandonean meals, such as *tortilla wah*, *tortilla wah* filled with beans, *tamaly nahwah*, etc. As early as in the introduction to chapter 5 – *Art*, Milan Kováč – quite rightly – in a way casts doubt upon its name, by saying that “*Lacandonean art can be spoken about only with certain reservation. The products that potentially could be characterized as artistic either serve to ritual purposes or their production is completely utilitarian: they are destined for sale to tourists*”. It is clear that the latter are often of negligible artistic value, whereas the former are usually hardly accessible for researchers. Kováč, however, tries to outline certain classification and subsequently a description of six categories: *ritual ceramics, clay figurines, symbolical paintings, wood figurines, natural latex sculptures, and engravings on pumpkin vessels*. The description of all groups is accompanied by a valuable picture documentation.

Chapter 7 – *Music and Songs* – points out the fact that songs and dances, as well as in the case of most other *primitive peoples*, are not used for entertainment or relaxation, but they have distinct magical purpose. Even what we might consider to be love poetry is closer rather to *love magic*. The chapter is illustrated by several extracts of Lacandonean songs.

Chapter 8 – *Myths* – stresses the fact that Lacandonean myths are – in contrast to many other Indian ethnicities of Mexico – still an integral part of culture as they still play the role that had been lost long ago in many other cultures.

Lacandonean myths explain the origin of things, gods and people, as it was once usual almost anywhere in the world. They form such an inseparable part of everyday life of this ethnicity, that the research of Lacandonean culture is almost impossible without the knowledge of the mythology. Also this chapter includes several extracts, each of which is complemented by a detailed and very instructive commentary.

The last chapter is devoted to traditional religion (*Aboriginal Lacandonean Religion*), which is given an elementary critical analysis, together with a commented survey of the most important gods.

The text of the book is supplemented by a dictionary of the used Lacandonean terms, a register, and a survey of the most important sources, as well as a bibliographical note summarizing the sources and literature in Czech and Slovak languages.

The book, rather thin but immensely interesting, presents a remarkable contribution for the research of the Indian ethnicities of Mexico.

Oldřich Kašpar