



The Burden of the Ancients: Maya Ceremonies of World Renewal from the Pre-columbian Period to the Present

Allen J. Christenson

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In Maya theology, everything from humans and crops to gods and the world itself passes through endless cycles of birth, maturation, dissolution, death, and rebirth. Traditional Maya believe that human beings perpetuate this cycle through ritual offerings and ceremonies that have the power to rebirth the world at critical points during the calendar year. The most elaborate ceremonies take place during Semana Santa (Holy Week), the days preceding Easter on the Christian calendar, during which traditionalist Maya replicate many of the most important world-renewing rituals that their ancient ancestors practiced at the end of the calendar year in anticipation of the New Year's rites.

Marshaling a wealth of evidence from Pre-Columbian texts, early colonial Spanish writings, and decades of fieldwork with present-day Maya, *The Burden of the Ancients* presents a masterfully detailed account of world-renewing ceremonies that spans the Pre-Columbian era through the crisis of the Conquest period and the subsequent colonial occupation all the way to the present. Allen J. Christenson focuses on Santiago Atitlán, a Tz'utujil Maya community in highland Guatemala, and offers the first systematic analysis of how the Maya preserved important elements of their ancient world renewal ceremonies by adopting similar elements of Roman Catholic observances and infusing them with traditional Maya meanings. His extensive description of Holy Week in Santiago Atitlán demonstrates that the community's contemporary ritual practices and mythic stories bear a remarkable resemblance to similar cultural entities from its Pre-Columbian past.

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