



El Q'anil: Man of Lightning (Sun Tracks)

Victor Montejo

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The legend of El Q'anil, the "Man of Lightning," stands alongside such classic Maya literary artifacts as Popol Vuh and Chilam Balam but has been preserved only through the oral tradition of the Jakaltek Maya. In this tale, the young man Xhuwan Q'anil brings lightning to his people in order to save them from destruction. He undertakes a journey of adventure, participates in a great war, and is subsequently immortalized. It is a story that all Jakaltek children learn, one that reinforces their identity by showing that their people have a hero who lives in each Jakaltek Maya today. Víctor Montejo, who was raised in Maya culture and knows its lore intimately, compiled several versions of the legend in Guatemala during the height of paramilitary operations in that country in the 1980s. His contemporary reconstruction lovingly preserves this legend and reflects concern for the survival of Maya culture in the face of oppression. Just as the Maya people of western Guatemala continue to pray for peace at the sanctuary of Q'anil, the legend of the Man of Lightning affirms a culture's enduring traditions. In this edition, the text is presented in English, Spanish, and Jakaltek Maya to secure its deserved place in world literature.

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