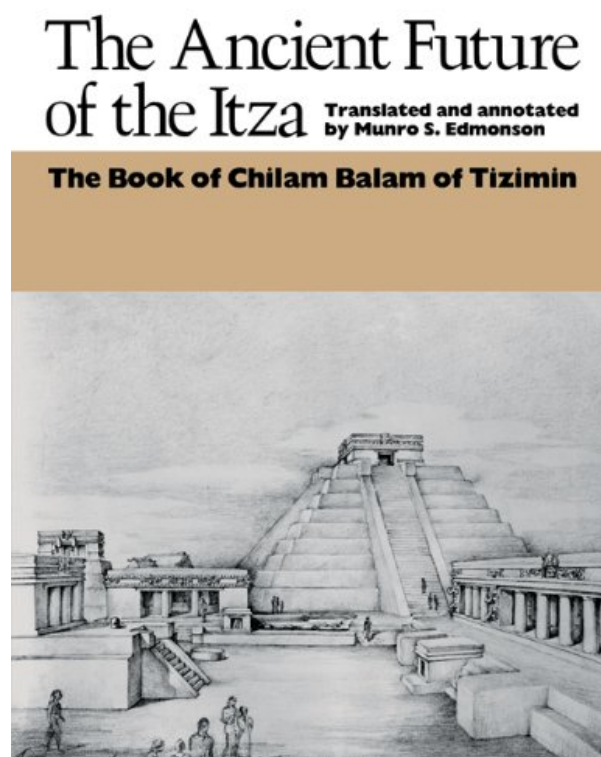


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The Ancient Future of the Itza

Translated and annotated
by Munro S. Edmonson

The Book of Chilam Balam of Tizimin



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About the Author

Munro S. Edmonson (1924-2002) was Professor of Anthropology at Tulane University.

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The title of Edmonson's work refers to the Mayan custom of first predicting their history and then living it, and it may be that no other peoples have ever gone so far in this direction. The Book of Chilam Balam was a sacred text prepared by generations of Mayan priests to record the past and to predict the future. The official prophet of each twenty-year rule was the Chilam Balam, or Spokesman of the Jaguar—the Jaguar being the supreme authority charged with converting the prophet's words into fact.

This is a literal but poetic translation of one of fourteen known manuscripts in Yucatecan Maya on ritual and history. It pictures a world of all but incredible numerological order, slowly yielding to Christianity and Spanish political pressure but never surrendering. In fact, it demonstrates the surprising truth of a secret Mayan government during the Spanish rule, which continued to collect tribute in the names of the ruined Classic cities and preserved the essence of the Mayan calendar as a legacy for the tradition's modern inheritors.

The history of the Yucatecan Maya from the seventh to the nineteenth century is revealed. And this is history as the Maya saw it—of a people concerned with lords and priests, with the cosmology which justified their rule, and with the civil war which they perceived as the real dimension of the colonial period.

A work of both history and literature, the Tizimin presents a great deal of Mayan thought, some of which has been suspected but not previously documented. Edmonson's skillful reordering of the text not only makes perfect historical sense but also resolves the long-standing problem of correlating the two colonial Mayan calendars. The book includes both interpretative and literal translations, as well as the Maya parallel couplets and extensive annotations on each page. The beauty of the sacred text is illuminated by the literal translation, while both versions unveil the magnificent historical, philosophical, and social traditions of the most sophisticated native culture in the New World.

The prophetic history of the Tizimin creates a portrait of the continuity and vitality, of the ancient past and the foreordained future of the Maya.

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