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The Ch'ol Maya of Chiapas

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The Ch'ol Maya of Chiapas

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The Ch’ol Maya who live in the western Mexican state of Chiapas are direct descendants of the Maya of the Classic period. Exploring their history and culture, volume editor Karen Bassie-Sweet and the other authors assembled here uncover clear continuity between contemporary Maya rituals and beliefs and their ancient counterparts.

With evocative and thoughtful essays by leading scholars of Maya culture, *The Ch’ol Maya of Chiapas*, the first collection to focus fully on the Ch’ol Maya, takes readers deep into ancient caves and reveals new dimensions of Ch’ol cosmology. In contemporary Ch’ol culture the contributors find a wealth of historical material that they then interweave with archaeological data to yield surprising and illuminating insights. The colonial and twentieth-century descendants of the Postclassic period Ch’ol and Lacandon Ch’ol, for instance, provide a window on the history and conquest of the early Maya. Several authors examine Early Classic paintings in the Ch’ol ritual cave known as Jolja that document ancient cave ceremonies not unlike Ch’ol rituals performed today, such as petitioning a cave-dwelling mountain spirit for health, rain, and abundant harvests.

Other essays investigate deities identified with caves, mountains, lightning, and meteors to trace the continuity of ancient Maya beliefs through the centuries, in particular the ancient origin of contemporary rituals centering on the Ch’ol mountain deity Don Juan. An appendix containing three Ch’ol folktales and their English translations rounds out the volume.

Charting paths literal and figurative to earlier trade routes, pre-Columbian sites, and ancient rituals and beliefs, *The Ch’ol Maya of Chiapas* opens a fresh, richly informed perspective on Maya culture as it has evolved and endured over the ages.

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