



Heaven Born Merida and Its Destiny: The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel (Texas Pan American)

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When the Spaniards conquered the Yucatan Peninsula in the early 1500s, they made a great effort to destroy or Christianize the native cultures flourishing there. That they were in large part unsuccessful is evidenced by the survival of a number of documents written in Maya and preserved and added to by literate Mayas up to the 1830s. *The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel* is such a document, literally the history of Yucatan written by and for Mayas, and it contains much information not available from Spanish sources because it was part of an underground resistance movement of which the Spanish were largely unaware.

Well known to Mayanists, *The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel* is presented here in Munro S. Edmonson's English translation, extensively annotated. Edmonson reinterprets the book as literature and as history, placing it in chronological order and translating it as poetry. The ritual nature of Mayan history clearly emerges and casts new light on Mexican and Spanish acculturation of the Yucatecan Maya in the post-Classic and colonial periods.

Centered in the city of Merida, the *Chumayel* provides the western (Xiu) perspective on Yucatecan history, as Edmonson's earlier book *The Ancient Future of the Itza: The Book of Chilam Balam of Tizimin* presented the eastern (Itza) viewpoint. Both document the changing calendar of the colonial period and the continuing vitality of pre-Columbian ritual thought down to the nineteenth century. Perhaps the biggest surprise is the survival of the long-count dating system down to the Baktun Ceremonial of 1618 (12.0.0.0.0). But there are others: the use of rebus writing, the survival of the *tun* until 1752, graphic if oblique accounts of Mayan ceremonial drama, and the depiction of the Spanish conquest as a long-term inter-Mayan civil war.

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Editorial Review

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About the Author

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

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Daisy Richardson:

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