



# The Indian Christ, the Indian King: The Historical Substrate of Maya Myth and Ritual

*Victoria Reifler Bricker*

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Victoria Bricker shows that "history" sometimes rests on mythological foundations and that "myth" can contain valid historical information. Her book, which is a highly original critique of postconquest historiography about the Maya, challenges major assumptions about the relationship between myth and history implicit in structuralist interpretations. The focus of the book is ethnic conflict, a theme that pervades Maya folklore and is also well documented historically.

The book begins with the Spanish conquest of the Maya. In chapters on the postconquest history of the Maya, five ethnic conflicts are treated in depth: the Cancuc revolt of 1712, the Quisteil uprising of 1761, the Totonacapan rebellion of 1820, the Caste War of Yucatan (1847-1901), and the Chamulan uprising in 1869. Analytical chapters consider the relationship between historical events and modern folklore about ethnic conflict. Bricker demonstrates that myths and rituals emphasize structure at the expense of temporal and geographical provenience, treating events separated by centuries or thousands of miles as equivalent and interchangeable.

An unexpected result of Bricker's research is the finding that many seemingly aboriginal elements in Maya folklore are actually of postconquest origin, and she shows that it is possible to determine precisely when and, more important, *why* they become part of myth and ritual. Furthermore, she finds that the patterning of the accretion of events in folklore over time provides clues to the function, or meaning, of myth and ritual for the Maya.

Bricker has made use of many unpublished documents in Spanish, English, and Maya, as well as standard synthetic historical works. The appendices contain extensive samples of the oral traditions that are explained by her analysis.

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