



# **Rabinal Achi: A Mayan Drama of War and Sacrifice**

*Dennis Tedlock*

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Here is one of the most important surviving works of pre-Columbian civilization, Rabinal Achi, a Mayan drama set a century before the arrival of the Spanish, produced by the translator of the best selling Popol Vuh.

The first direct translation into English from Quiche Maya, based on the original text, Rabinal Achi is the story of city-states, war, and nobility, of diplomacy, mysticism, and psychic journeys. Cawek of the Forest People has been captured by Man of Rabinal, who serves a ruler named Lord Five Thunder. Cawek is a renegade, a warrior who has inflicted much suffering on Rabinal. Yet he is also the son of the lord of the allied city of Quiche--a noble who once fought alongside Man of Rabinal. The drama presents the confrontation between the two during the trial of Cawek, who defies his captors and proudly accepts death by beheading. Dennis Tedlock's translation is clear and vivid; more than that, it is rooted in an understanding of how the play is actually performed. Despite being banned for centuries by Spanish authorities, it survived in actual practice, and is still performed in the town of Rabinal today. Tedlock's photographs and diagrams accompany the text, capturing nuances not apparent in the dialogue alone. He also provides an introduction and commentary that explain the historical events compressed into the play, the Spanish influence on the Mayan dramatic tradition, and the cultural and religious world preserved in this remarkable play.

Rabinal Achi ranks as a classic of Mayan literature--and a rare window on a world that had yet to be invaded by Europeans. Dennis Tedlock brings this drama to life in all its richness.

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