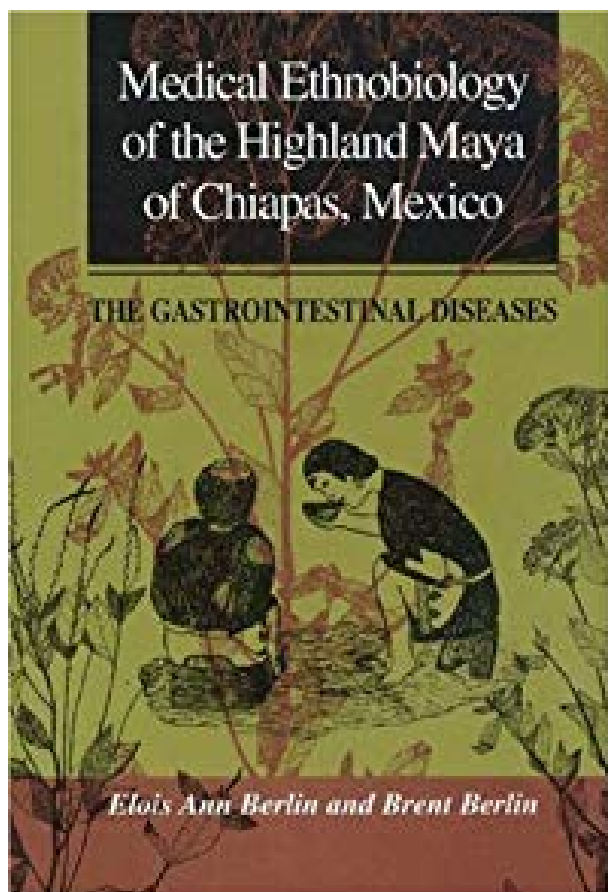


Medical Ethnobiology of the Highland Maya of Chiapas, Mexico: The Gastrointestinal Diseases



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Whereas most previous work on Maya healing has focused on ritual and symbolism, this book presents evidence that confirms the scientific foundations of traditional Maya medicine. Data drawn from analysis of the medical practices of two Mayan-speaking peoples, the Tzeltal and Tzotzil, reveal that they have developed a large number of herbal remedies based on a highly sophisticated understanding of the physiology and symptomatology of common diseases and on an in-depth knowledge of medicinal plants. Here Elois Ann Berlin and Brent Berlin, along with their many collaborators, provide detailed information on Maya disease classification, symptomatology, and treatment of the most significant health conditions affecting the Highland Maya, the gastrointestinal diseases. The authors base their work on broad-ranging comparative ethno-medical and ethnobotanical data collected over seven years of original field research. In describing the Mayas' understanding and treatment of gastrointestinal diseases, Berlin and Berlin show that the plants used as remedies are "condition specific." Moreover, laboratory studies demonstrate that the most commonly agreed upon herbal remedies are potentially effective against the pathogenic agents underlying specific diseases and that they strongly affect the physiological processes associated with intestinal peristalsis. These findings suggest that the traditional Maya medical system is the result of long-term explicit empirical experimentation with the effects of herbal remedies on bodily function. Originally published in 1996. The Princeton Legacy

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