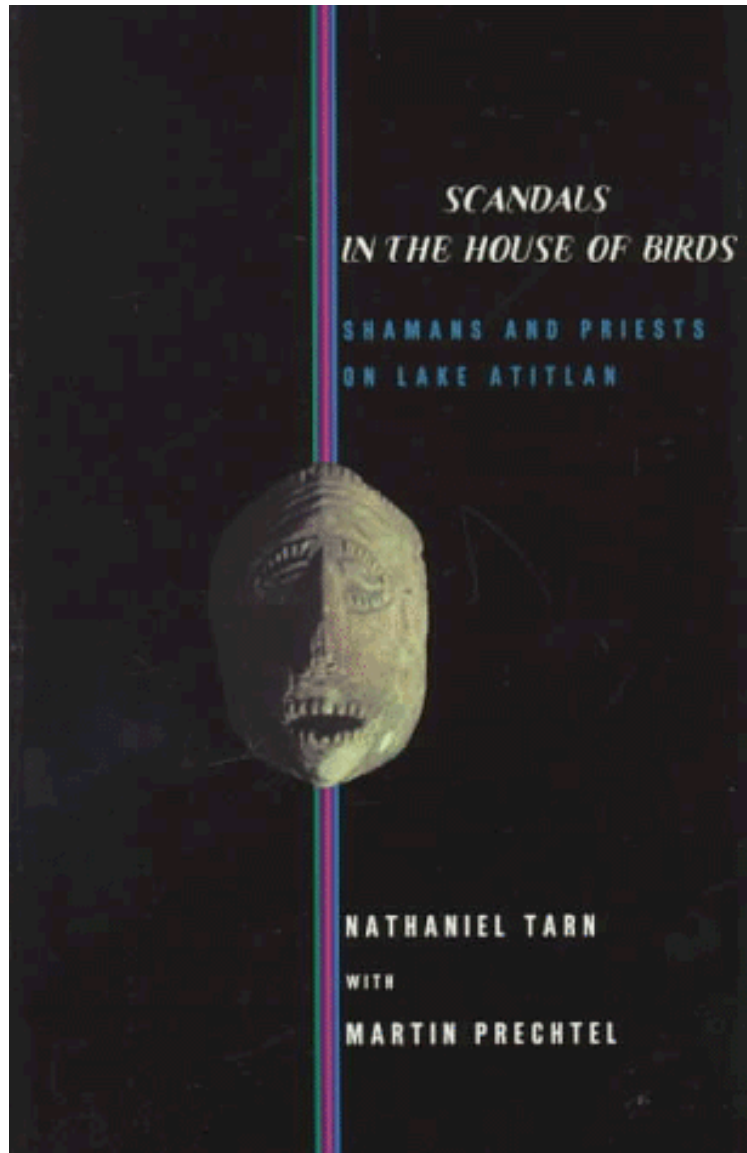


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## Scandals in the House of Birds: Shamans and Priests on Lake Atitlan

*Nathaniel Tarn, Martin Prechtel*  
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**Nathaniel Tarn, Martin Prechtel : Scandals in the House of Birds: Shamans and Priests on Lake Atitlan** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Scandals in the House of Birds: Shamans and Priests on Lake Atitlan:

43 of 43 people found the following review helpful. ethnographic representation at the cutting edge By A Customer In a

word, "Scandals in the House of Birds: Shamans and Priests on Lake Atitlan" is among the most remarkable ethnographies that I have read. Written by one of anthropology's and poetry's leading innovators, Nathaniel Tarn, the book is at the cutting edge in ethnographic representation. It reflects the author's nearly five decades of scholarly dedication to the Tz'utujil Mayan town of Santiago Atitlan, and demonstrates the craftsmanship of a master poet and writer. The book is largely an exploration of the enchanted entanglements surrounding a local deity, the notorious god Maximon. In so doing, it spans from a time when deities walked a mythological landscape, to the 1990s, when the all too real grim reapers of the Guatemalan army prowl about. Along the journey, the reader is introduced to contemporary Mayan shamans, and also to Martin Prechtel, a fascinating Euroamerican who held a high religious position in the town during one of the author's stays. (It merits note that the book offers a far more grounded version of Prechtel's tenure in Atitlan than that found in Prechtel's own published account.) Although "Scandals in the House of Birds" is written entirely by Nathaniel Tarn, he graciously cites Prechtel as a contributor of substantial information and experience. Underlying much of the book is a 1950s "sacred crime" when Maximon's wooden head was stolen by Catholic priests, found its way to a major European museum, and eventually was returned to the town, largely through the joint efforts of Tarn and Prechtel. With that drama providing a backdrop, Tarn intersperses myths about Maximon and other regional Mayan deities, discusses the roles played by Prechtel and himself in the town, all the while tying in considerable cultural data. Of particular note is the book's innovative multivocality. Most of the book's chapters are devoted to particular historical or mythological incidents, for instance the birth of Maximon. Tarn breaks the narration into its significant episodes and then presents side by side versions of the episode narrated by such individuals as Weep Wizard, Loincloth, Prechtel, or the author himself. As with any innovative, dare I say experimental, ethnography, "Scandals in the House of Birds" demands the reader's attention. Despite its multi-layered complexity the reader never feels overwhelmed, but instead is carried along by the book's surprises and innovations. The book should have wide appeal to students and scholars of Latin America, to anthropologists and to writers, as well as to those interested native peoples and their cultures.

Robert S. Carlsen  
14 of 24 people found the following review helpful.  
Curious, working draft bound on nice paper  
By A Customer...I was surprised to see a sweeping endorsement by Octavio Pazon the back cover... Imagine my disappointment upon finding the simple black and white maps to be the most illustrative content in this work in progress. This reader had the sense of being dumped for the first time [as if from a Stargate] into some abstract world that makes little sense. There is no introduction. While the authors want to be informative, the jumbled chaos of random events is difficult to follow. The accounts of various adventures comprise an odd catalog of short tales that are entertaining. They are revealing of simple daily life in a small village facing the demons of technology and modernization....it has some academic pretensions and at other times seems a personal essay or an abstract poetic impression. The writing seems like a translation from an older text in a different language. Some of the political commentaries are redundant. The subtitle of this book is "Shamans and Priests on Lake Atitlan" - it might better be called "Reflections on the disintegration of traditional Atitlan culture and folkways."... Students of Guatemalan history, and Mayan ethnographic scholars may find the descriptions of rituals and the dictionary of Tz'utujil Maya and Spanish terms a welcome addition. I would like to see an improved second edition, but don't anticipate a market for it.  
13 of 22 people found the following review helpful. More Martin less Tarn  
By A CustomerI was extremely disappointed in this book. The only memorable parts were those written by Prechtel. The rest is a confusing mishmash of undeveloped personalities and poorly described events. I'm amazed that Tarn has such a reputation!

a multivoiced epic of a sacred crime in Guatemala