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Mexico is famous for spectacular fiestas that embody its heart and soul. An expression of the cult of the saint, patron saint fiestas are the centerpiece of Mexican popular religion and of great importance to the lives and cultures of people and communities. These fiestas have their own language, objects, belief systems, and practices. They link Mexico's past and present, its indigenous and European populations, and its local and global relations.

This work provides a comprehensive study of two intimately linked patron saint fiestas in the state of Guanajuato, near San Miguel de Allende--the fiesta of the village of Cruz del Palmar and that of the town of San Luis de la Paz. These two fiestas are related to one another in very special ways involving both religious practices and their respective pre-Hispanic origins.

A mixture of secular and sacred, patron saint fiestas are multi-day affairs that include many events, ritual specialists, and performers, with the participation of the entire community. Fiestas take place in order to honor the saints, and they are the occasion for religious ceremonies, processions, musical performances, dances, and dance dramas. They feature spectacular costumes, enormous puppets, masked and cross-dressed individuals, dazzling fireworks, rodeos, food stands, competitions, and public dances. By encompassing all of these events and performances, this work displays the essence of Mexico, a lens through which this country's complex history, religion, ethnic mix, traditions, and magic can be viewed.