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### Judith Francis Zeitlin, Cultural Politics in Colonial Tehuantepec: Community and State among the Isthmus Zapotec, 1500-1750

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*Cultural Politics in Colonial Tehuantepec: Community and State among the Isthmus Zapotec, 1500-1750.* By Judith Francis Zeitlin. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005. xix + 323 pp. Illustrations, maps, graphs, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$60.00 cloth.)

In this magnificent book, Judith Zeitlin combines interpretations of archaeological, historical, and linguistic data to explore the rise of the late-pre-Hispanic Isthmus Zapotec state and Zapotec responses to Spanish colonialism in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. According to the brief narrative in the preface, the book was more than twenty-five year in the making. Zeitlin recounts the personal journey of an archaeologist training herself to conduct research as a documentary historian, then returning to the field to conduct excavations of colonial-period Isthmus Zapotec sites.

The first two chapters deal with the Zapotec conquest of Tehuantepec and the pre-Hispanic Zapotec social and political organization in Tehuantepec, respectively. Discussing the historiography of the Tehuantepec invasion, Zeitlin builds upon the work of modern scholars as a point of departure, relying on the chroniclers and historian Francisco de Burgoa, José Antonio Gay, and Manuel Martínez Gracida, then going beyond these readings of traditional or conventional narrative history by incorporating interpretations from native historical sources such as the Lienzo de Guevea, the Codex Nuttall, and the Codex Bodley. Zeitlin balances information from these sources with data from sixteenth-century legal proceedings connected with the descendants of the Zapotec royal family. She then integrates the historical data

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with the archaeological evidence from the Tehuantepec region on the Zapotec invasion, which Zeitlin places in the second half of the fifteenth century A.D.

Zeitlin projects back from sixteenth-century documentary sources to reconstruct aspects of late-preconquest social and political life in Tehuantepec. These chapters conclude with a discussion of foreign relations between the Isthmus Zapotecs and other Mesoamerican polities, especially the hostilities with the Aztecs. Zeitlin makes the important point here that the Zapotec polity that emerged so rapidly in the fifteenth century was built on shaky foundations, undermined by both internal and external threats.

Zeitlin next examines political and religious change from the time of the conquest in 1521 until the death of the last pre-Columbian ruler of Tehuantepec in 1562. Sixteenth-century relations with Spanish colonial authorities largely revolved around the Tehuantepec cacique Don Juan Cortés (known in Zapotec by his calendrical name Bichana Lachi) and his widow, Doña Magdalena. A discussion of the imposition of Christianity through the evangelization efforts of the Dominicans features a fascinating account of the apostasy of Don Juan, emphasizing the political dimensions of religious authority and ritual.

The colonial political economy from 1563 to 1660 is the subject of the following chapter which examines the growth of the Dominican enterprise in Tehuantepec, depopulation and *congregación*, and the growth of ranching among Spaniards as well as the Zapotec elite. The period begins with the transfer of the province of Tehuantepec from the *marquesado* (Hernán Cortés' seignorial domain) to the authority of the Spanish Crown. A short, penultimate chapter offers reflections on historical memory and political authority among Isthmus Zapotecs, examining issues of ethnicity and social identity. The final chapter, on Isthmus Zapotec politics and the trajectory of change, places the author's conclusions in a comparative Mesoamerican framework.

This book is rewarding in a number of ways. Zeitlin's careful and subtle historical reconstructions avoid undue speculation. The elegant writing style invites careful attention. Theoretical digressions and comparative comments are adroitly woven within the text so as not to disrupt the narrative. Ultimately, the narrative poses the problem of how best to reconcile the apparently contradictory values of the Isthmus Zapotecs' fierce autonomy and resistance to outside interference with their resilient and practical adoption or adaptation of Spanish institution and technologies. Zeitlin wisely allows readers to ponder their own answers to the conundrum.

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