

The Mixtecs of Oaxaca: Ancient Times to the Present. By Ronald Spores and Andrew K. Balkansky. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013. 328 pages. \$45.00 cloth.

This historical anthropology of the Mixteca region in Oaxaca, Mexico, and its associated people, the Mixtecs, surveys major developments from around 2000 BCE, the earliest appearance of settlements, up to the present. Ronald Spores has done extensive documentary research on the Mixtecs and both he and coauthor Andrew K. Balkansky have conducted numerous archaeological excavations in the area. Because of their work we now know much more about Mixtec architecture, of which there had been few examples; one of this book's features is an artist's reconstruction of ancient Yucundaa-Teposcolula. The authors consider many topics ranging from language history, conquest, environment and geography, land use, royal succession, markets, governmental structure, and religion throughout the long historical development of the Mixtecs. They use what they call a "convergent approach," an integration of archaeology, linguistics, ethnology, and documentary ethnohistory.

The book contains eight chapters, divided into two sections. The first section, "The Mixtecs in Ancient Times," includes four chapters on pre-Hispanic Mixtec civilization. The second, "The Mixtecs in Spanish Colonial and Modern Times," has two chapters on the Spanish colonial Mixteca; one on the nineteenth century; and one on modern times. Geographically, the Mixteca comprises the western third of the state of Oaxaca, western Guerrero, and parts of southern Puebla, traditionally divided into three subareas: the Mixteca Alta, the Mixteca Baja, and the Mixteca Costa. Linguistically, it may be divided into five areas, with Mixteca Alta and Baja each having two language subgroups. The Mixtec language belongs to the Oto-Manguean stock of Mesoamerican languages, which additionally include Zapotec, also located in the state of Oaxaca, and Otomi, located in central and northeast Mexico. Spores and Balkansky cover all three Mixteca subregions, with the Mixteca Alta, the core area of Mixtec development and the most populous since pre-Hispanic times, receiving the most attention.

As it did in other areas of Mesoamerica, agriculture formed the basis of Mixtec civilization. The Mixteca Alta is mountainous, with small broken uneven valleys whose settlements range in altitude from 600 to 2000 meters. To accommodate the rough topography, the Mixtecs developed a system of terracing known as *oo-yoo* that may be unique among Mesoamerican groups. Known primarily as an important regional component of Mesoamerican civilization in the postclassic period (ca. 900 BCE–1500 CE), the Mixteca Alta produced a pictorial writing system that details the history of the various Mixtec kingdoms. This unique writing system influenced other writing systems in Mesoamerica, such as that of the Nahuatl speaking peoples in central Mexico. In fact, the greatest number of surviving pre-Columbian books or codices come from this region and its people, producing a native written record of dynasties and "kings" rivaled only by the ancient Maya. This topic is treated in some detail, although it is a small part of the total work.

Among the other informational highlights included in *The Mixtecs of Oaxaca*, I found the following to be of particular interest:

1. The Mixteca had a formative or pre-classic period beginning perhaps as early as 1500 BCE. By the middle formative it was one of the demographic core regions of Mesoamerica, along with others such as the Valley of Oaxaca and the Valley of Mexico. By this time the Mixtec people probably inhabited what is now called the Mixteca. Further, there is no evidence that Olmec civilization was the influence for this pre-classic development, so it must be assumed that it probably developed independently.

2. Urbanization had an autochthonous development in the classic period (ca. 300–900 CE), and therefore the Mixteca was not a backwater of Zapotec Monte Alban civilization in the Valley of Oaxaca, as has often been thought. Mixtec cities such as Yucuita, Yucunudahui, and Monte Negro developed a distinctive dispersed urban pattern when independent “kingdoms” developed. There was no Mixtec “empire” or centralized state like the Monte Alban civilization, even though they may have shared a writing system with the Zapotecs. The post-classic period in the Mixteca continued the pattern of independent kingdoms such as Tezacoalco, Tilantongo, Teposcolula, Jaltepec, Acatlan, Tututepec, and Yanhuitlan, among others, which forged alliances between themselves and with communities in the Zapotec Valley of Oaxaca. The Mixtec kingdoms, called *yuhuituyu* or *cacicazcos*, survived the Spanish conquest and continued even into the nineteenth century, albeit in modified form. Mixtec *caciques* (and *cacicas*) made status and property claims well into the period of Mexico’s independence from Spain.

3. The Mixteca survives today as a viable area and its people maintain a marked regional identity. Although it had a thriving cochineal industry in the colonial period, in recent times, due to the area’s poverty, Mixtecs have migrated to many other locations, including the United States, and have become involved in “economic globalization” (225). The authors see this modern development as somewhat unique in spite of a long-existing pattern of Mixtec diaspora.

From a theoretical perspective, there are three levels of anthropological discourse that detail (1) how a people, group, village, etc. are unlike all other peoples; (2) how a people are like many others (middle-range theory); and (3), how a specific people are like all other people, or humanity as a whole (meta-theory). Perhaps because of the senior authors’ lifelong exclusive preoccupation with the Mixtecs, they are presented as exceptions to most generalizations, a perspective associated with Boasian historical particularism or historicism. Hence this work almost exclusively addresses how the Mixtecs are unique, the first category. There is some material dealing with likenesses on the second level, but as might be expected, almost none on the third. Further, matters regarding the conceptualization of states, cities, urbanism, stratification, class, peasants, community and ethnicity, among others, are often cursorily dismissed. Dogmatic assertions too often replace careful analytical concepts or comparisons. In other words, one weakness of the book is that it fails to place the Mixtecs and the Mixteca in an adequate cross-cultural perspective, either within Mesoamerica or elsewhere. Theory either remains implicit or is nonexistent.

There are also some gaps in specific information that are difficult to explain. For example, the town of Mitla in the Valley of Oaxaca, which had significant pre-Hispanic ties with the Mixteca although the exact nature of that relationship is unclear, is hardly

mentioned. There is a photograph of well-known Oaxacan archaeologist John Paddock examining the Mixteca-Puebla style wall paintings at Mitla. Mitla does appear in a list of places related to the pre-Hispanic Mixtec diaspora but not until page 228, toward the end of the book, and there is no mention of its significance. Another matter, probably not the fault of the authors, is the dark quality of many of the photographs, which not only make them less attractive but also of less value. The index, like those in many recent books, is very incomplete, and items are often not found on the pages designated. For example, there is no mention of Mitla on page 22, as the index indicates. The bibliography is adequate but necessarily highly selective. Fortunately, biases are noted in the preface and introductory materials and will be clear to those familiar with the literature on the area.

Nevertheless, the book is impressive, especially in its use of historical documents. The archives in Mexico and Spain have been thoroughly exploited, and the chapters on the late pre-Hispanic states, the colonial period, and the colonial *caciques* are its strongest features. The book also does much to clarify specific issues dealing with the relationship between colonial and pre-Hispanic settlements within the Oaxaca region, such as Cuilapan, Teposcolula, and Yanhuitlan. The authors document colonial interactions between Spaniards and Mixtecs in great detail; meticulous research shows that characteristics often thought to have been pre-Hispanic in origin were actually colonial.

Given its thorough documentation, and the longtime association of the senior author with this region—Spores has spent well over fifty years of dedicated, persistent engagement in Mixtec archaeology and ethnohistory—this book is a must for all scholars working in Mesoamerica, Oaxaca, and the Mixteca. It will be of interest to serious readers of Native American and Latin American studies as well. There is no other book of comparable scope on the topic. As are Spores' two earlier books on the Mixtecs, also published by the University of Oklahoma Press, *The Mixtecs of Oaxaca: Ancient Times to the Present* is destined to become a classic in the field.

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The Native American Renaissance: Literary Imagination and Achievement. Edited by Alan R. Velie and A. Robert Lee. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013. 376 pages. \$29.95 paper.

The “renaissance” of Kenneth Lincoln’s *Native American Renaissance* (1983) has a vexing legacy. Published three decades ago, Lincoln’s study was timed to an unprecedented proliferation of Native writers in the American book market, a moment that, on the heels of Red Power, felt politically and disciplinarily significant. For Lincoln, the renaissance meant an upheaval whose valence is “not so much new . . . as regenerate” that required “tracing the connective threads between the cultural past and its expression in the present” (8, 2). For many Native literary scholars, Lincoln’s