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**Abstract of the Dissertation:
The Body in the Mixtec Codices: Birth, Purification, Transformation
and Death**

Research Year: 1995

Culture: Mixtec

Chronology: Terminal Classic to Modern

Location: México

Sites: Oaxaca, Puebla, and Guerrero

Prehispanic Mixtec world view emphasized the human body, which influenced and shaped the perception of the social and natural environment. Ideas about the body itself, along with body imagery and symbols, are a direct reflection of social ideology (Douglas 1970). This literally "embodied" world view is physically and ideologically reflected in the ancient screenfold manuscripts called codices, of which seven have survived to the present day.

The Mixtec elite body was projected directly onto the physical world as demonstrated in representations of active landscape in the manuscripts, through animistic beliefs about the spirits that inhabit the landscape, and in language use that survives to the present.

The themes of birth, purification, transformation, and death are examined in the codices to demonstrate that the elite Mixtec body both physically and ideologically embodies political power and status, facilitates reciprocity with the ancestors, and is manipulated to further individual political ambitions. By combining the study of the human body with the study of these ancient manuscripts, it is possible to examine both physiological and societal perceptions of the body to arrive at deeper understandings of ancient world view. The genealogical codices are not merely static recitations of descent, but are a window into ancient thought and society.

Much of the same thought continues among contemporary Mixteca speakers of Oaxaca, Puebla, and Guerrero, México. As that world view is based in and of the body, it is transported both through time – from the Terminal Classic to the present – and across space – from the Mixteca to the United States and Canada – via the continuing migrations of the Mixtec.

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