



Becoming an Ancestor: The Isthmus Zapotec Way of Death

Anya Peterson Royce

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A striking look at the death rituals of an indigenous community in North America.

Powerful and beautifully written, this is the story of the Isthmus Zapotecs of southern Mexico and their unbroken chain of ancestors and collective memory over the generations. Mortuary beliefs and actions are collective and pervasive in ways not seen in the United States, a resonant deep structure across many domains of Zapotec culture.

Anthropologist Anya Peterson Royce draws upon forty years of participant research in the city of Juchitán to offer a finely textured portrait of the vibrant and enduring power of death in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec of Mexico. Focusing especially on the lives of Zapotec women, *Becoming an Ancestor* highlights the aesthetic sensibility and durability of mortuary traditions in the past and present. An intricate blending of Roman Catholicism and indigenous spiritual tradition, death through beliefs and practices expresses a collective solidarity that connects families, binds the living and dead, and blurs the past and present.

A model of ethnographic research and presentation, *Becoming an Ancestor* not only reveals the luminescent heart of Zapotec culture but also provides important clues about the cultural power and potential of mortuary traditions for all societies.

“...[a] well-written anthropological study ... The author’s attention to the aesthetic quality of the death-related customs and the inclusion of numerous photographs and eloquent poems by local authors enhance her book.” — CHOICE

Anya Peterson Royce is Chancellor’s Professor of Anthropology and of Comparative Literature at Indiana University Bloomington. Her books include *Anthropology of the Performing Arts: Artistry, Virtuosity, and Interpretation in a Cross-Cultural Perspective* and *The Anthropology of Dance*.

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