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Grounding the past : the praxis of participatory archaeology in the Mixteca Alta, Oaxaca, Mexico

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This book addresses field praxis and its embeddedness in the political present of Santiago Tilantongo and Santiago Apoala; two local descendant communities in the Mixteca Alta region of Oaxaca, Mexico. Critical reflection on the lack of participatory efforts has become an important theme in contemporary archeology recently. Alex Geurds argues here that eagerly constructed participatory archaeological projects, many of which go under the heading of 'community archaeology', are in need of similar reflexive analysis of their field praxis in order to exclude idealized and thus unthinking narratives of a harmonious archaeological praxis.

Past and present archaeological practice in the Mixteca Alta has acquired a negative image, with bad consequences for participatory research, due to problematic power relations and conflicting interests and issues of representation between the participating parties that archeological projects have failed to recognize. Geurds reviews the constitutive elements of these partnerships, such as official meetings, public presentations and imparted conferences, where the involved local and non-local social actors produce conflicting agendas by creating and transforming power relations. He detects and analyzes the attendant influences on the projects' participatory elements through the application of qualitative techniques derived from ethnography and social geography.

The first part of the book presents an objectifying narrative consistent with the regional archaeological tradition focused on materialist analysis of surface artifacts ranging from the Late Formative to the Postclassic period (300 BC – AD 1521) through survey and mapping. The second part explores alternative means for embedding the production of historical knowledge in local perceptions of landscape and monuments. The original conservation assessment forms and ceramic registration forms used in this research are included in full.

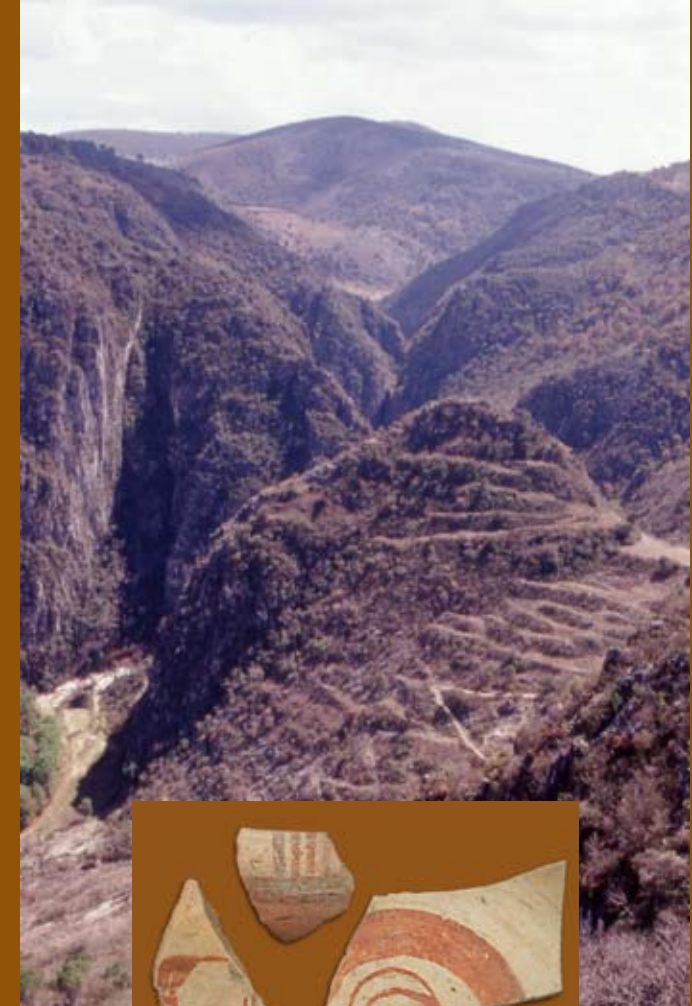
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The Praxis of Participatory Archaeology
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