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SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

History, Geography & Area Studies - Latin America & the Caribbean

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The following review appeared in the May 2008 issue of CHOICE:

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Jansen, Maarten. **Encounter with the plumed serpent: drama and power in the heart of Mesoamerica**, by Maarten Jansen and Gabina Aurora Pérez Jiménez. University Press of Colorado, 2007. 395p bibl index ISBN 9780870818684, \$ 75.00

This volume presents a myth-history of the Nuu Dzau (Mixtec) people of what is now Oaxaca, Mexico, from the time of original darkness through the 12th century. Following an overview of the pictorial manuscript sources and such interrelated themes as ritual and religion, the Mesoamerican calendar, and dynastic power, the authors (both, archaeology, Leiden Univ.) present a narrative of Nuu Dzau history thick with detail and, perhaps, best suited for specialists in the field. The plumed serpent of the title enters Nuu Dzau history first as Lord 9 Wind "Quetzalcoatl," a foundational figure whose cult was spread with the growth of dynasties in the region. Lord 4 Jaguar, the historical Quetzalcoatl and Toltec ruler, appears later in connection with Lord 8 Deer and his ultimately brutal attempts to amass power in the Nuu Dzau region and beyond. Throughout this account of Mixtec history, readers are provided with careful reconstruction of events, abundant documentation, and considered hypotheses. Text is accompanied by numerous illustrations, though more help deciphering the latter (as well as maps and kinship diagrams) would be appreciated. The authors' historiographical concerns about power link the past to the present in the final chapter. **Summing Up:** Recommended. Graduate students/faculty. -- C. Hendrickson, Marlboro College