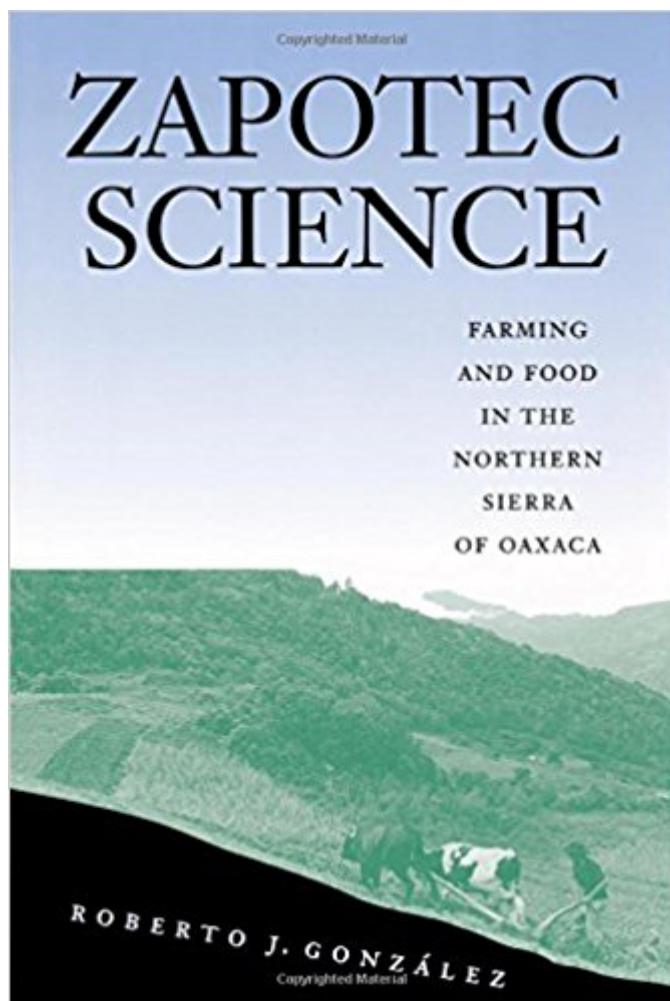


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Zapotec Science: Farming And Food In The Northern Sierra Of Oaxaca



Synopsis

Winner, Julian Steward Award, Anthropology & Environment Section, American Anthropological Association, 2003

Zapotec farmers in the northern sierra of Oaxaca, Mexico, are highly successful in providing their families with abundant, nutritious food in an ecologically sustainable fashion, although the premises that guide their agricultural practices would be considered erroneous by the standards of most agronomists and botanists in the United States and Europe. In this book, Roberto González convincingly argues that in fact Zapotec agricultural and dietary theories and practices constitute a valid local science, which has had a reciprocally beneficial relationship with European and United States farming and food systems since the sixteenth century. González bases his analysis upon direct participant observation in the farms and fields of a Zapotec village. By using the ethnographic fieldwork approach, he is able to describe and analyze the rich meanings that campesino families attach to their crops, lands, and animals. González also reviews the history of maize, sugarcane, and coffee cultivation in the Zapotec region to show how campesino farmers have intelligently and scientifically adapted their farming practices to local conditions over the course of centuries. By setting his ethnographic study of the Talea de Castro community within a historical world systems perspective, he also skillfully weighs the local impact of national and global currents ranging from Spanish colonialism to the 1910 Mexican Revolution to NAFTA. At the same time, he shows how, at the turn of the twenty-first century, the sustainable practices of "traditional" subsistence agriculture are beginning to replace the failed, unsustainable techniques of modern industrial farming in some parts of the United States and Europe.

Book Information

Paperback: 360 pages

Publisher: University of Texas Press; 1st edition (August 15, 2001)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0292728328

ISBN-13: 978-0292728325

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #469,253 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #124 in Books > Science & Math > Agricultural Sciences > History #424 in Books > Textbooks > Science & Mathematics > Agriculture #487 in Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Latin America

Customer Reviews

"cite>Zapotec Science is a major triumph of ethnographic insights in the understanding of farming practices." (Sustainable Communities Review)"This is a superb ethnographic work that can, and should, revolutionize a good deal of anthropology and the philosophy of science. . . . For anyone interested in Latin American traditional agriculture, it will be a "must read." (Eugene Anderson, Professor of Anthropology, University of California, Riverside)

"This is a superb ethnographic work that can, and should, revolutionize a good deal of anthropology and the philosophy of science. . . . For anyone interested in Latin American traditional agriculture, it will be a "must read." (Eugene Anderson, Professor of Anthropology, University of California, Riverside)

great condition!

Having lived in Oaxaca, Mexico for over a year now, I wanted something that would give me a better understanding of the indigenous people here. I was especially interested in how the local Mixtec and Zapotec farmers/ranchers live off the land ... and perhaps an explanation for why they are so opposed to buying imported corn instead of working so hard to raise their own maize. This book turned out to answer my curiosities as well as give me insight into Zapotec ways of thinking and doing that I hadn't considered. The book appears to have been written as an academic endeavor in its "tone" and extensive referencing of other scientists/authors. It struck me as somebody's Ph.D thesis turned into a book. Such is probably the "flavor" of any books of this level of detailed study, but those looking for a gentle summer reading may find it a bit tougher to chew. The only real complaint I have with the contents was how often items were repeated. Several facts were discussed several times and only very slightly altered...if at all. Anyway, so far this book has been my best introduction to the hardworking, friendly people of Oaxaca. I learned many interesting facts (e.g. how sugarcane is grown, processed, and prized here), I was forced to reconsider (and alter) several of my opinions about 'primitive' Mexican farming, and I gained a deeper respect for what these people do throughout their lives and the lives of their communities to keep alive their families and communities. I find myself citing it again and again when talking with other gringos about Oaxaca. Please note, three stars indicates a good book. It should NOT be perceived as a negative rating.

Having studied traditional healing in Oaxaca and being familiar with Zapotec culture, I am confident in recommending this well written, engaging book to anyone interested in Oaxaca or traditional cultures.

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