



Ritual and Power in Stone: The Performance of Rulership in Mesoamerican Izapan Style Art (Linda Schele Series in Maya and Pre-Columbian Studies)

Julia Guernsey

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The ancient Mesoamerican city of Izapa in Chiapas, Mexico, is renowned for its extensive collection of elaborate stone stelae and altars, which were carved during the Late Preclassic period (300 BC-AD 250). Many of these monuments depict kings garbed in the costume and persona of a bird, a well-known avian deity who had great significance for the Maya and other cultures in adjacent regions. This Izapan style of carving and kingly representation appears at numerous sites across the Pacific slope and piedmont of Mexico and Guatemala, making it possible to trace political and economic corridors of communication during the Late Preclassic period.

In this book, Julia Guernsey offers a masterful art historical analysis of the Izapan style monuments and their integral role in developing and communicating the institution of divine kingship. She looks specifically at how rulers expressed political authority by erecting monuments that recorded their performance of rituals in which they communicated with the supernatural realm in the persona of the avian deity. She also considers how rulers used the monuments to structure their built environment and create spaces for ritual and politically charged performances. Setting her discussion in a broader context, Guernsey also considers how the Izapan style monuments helped to motivate and structure some of the dramatic, pan-regional developments of the Late Preclassic period, including the forging of a codified language of divine kingship. This pioneering investigation, which links monumental art to the matrices of political, economic, and supernatural exchange, offers an important new understanding of a region, time period, and group of monuments that played a key role in the history of Mesoamerica and continue to intrigue scholars within the field of Mesoamerican studies.

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