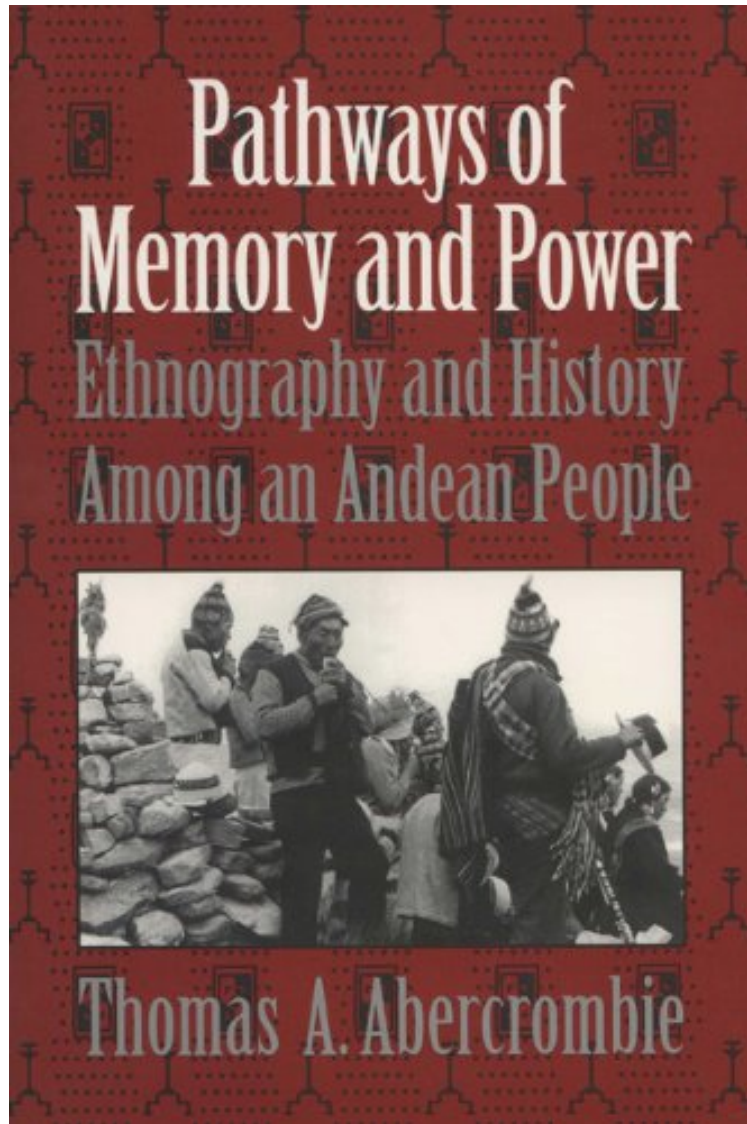


[PDF] Pathways of Memory and Power: Ethnography and History among an Andean People

# Pathways of Memory and Power: Ethnography and History among an Andean People

Thomas A. Abercrombie

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**Thomas A. Abercrombie : Pathways of Memory and Power: Ethnography and History among an Andean People** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Pathways of Memory and Power: Ethnography and History among an Andean People:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Fantastic research, albeit somewhat unorthodox, by author's own admission. Very interesting views of Aymara daily / ritual life. By Steven A. Maze I am grateful for the 'fully

embedded' approach the author took in giving us this journalistic view of the Aymara people. A U.S. citizen, I lived in Bolivia for the nine years prior to the authors work--his fieldwork beginning in nineteen seventy-nine. The book is systematically divided into three categories. The first is the author's narrative as he first approach the Aymara peoples. This section glosses over the details and instead lets us come to know the author, his expressed motives, and the technical, and sometimes physical hurdles, he encountered as he began the process of embedding himself. The second section is a detailed account of the whole of the written histories as viewed from the colonialist and Catholic Church records. These go back as early as the sixteenth century and help to paint one aspect of the memory of the Aymara. The third section uncovers the clandestine rituals and public and private festivals and their importance in serving as mnemonic methods of recalling oral tradition--Aymara versions of "what really happened" and their relation through timespace to pacha (universe). This book has given me welcomed insight needed to fill in the blanks in my own comprehension of the rituals and customs that surrounded me as a young boy. His work is meticulously documented, and his helpful glossary of Aymara terms rounds out the great research. The book paints a very beautiful but sometimes unsettling picture of the Aymara culture.

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Excellent read on indigenous world-views

By A reader

Two important elements of social "habit memory" processes strike me in *Pathways of Memory and Power*. The first is the apparent ease with which the colonial power asserted its program for "social amnesia" through a physical restructuring of social space (rectilinear, functional living spatial constructions) and time (the marking of Church calendrical and daily time, basically obliterating indigenous conceptions of time). The second is the reinterpretation of public and private to suit a colonial "moral code" based on the ritual performances of excessive drinking and bloodletting. These systematic, institutionalized policies effectively dismantled the indians' social habit-memories-replacing them with new ones modeled on Castilian life. The long-standing issue of religious syncretism is (thankfully) questioned, through an understanding of how the indigenous people create distinctions between the "more Christian" and "more Andean" aspects of their deities and religions. The quipu system of knotting preserves a physical remembering which was transformed, but not destroyed, by Christianity. As Abercrombie states, "the techniques may have remained the same, but the content, the memories, were changing" (p. 260). The "imagenes de bulto," which were introduced by colonial priests, replaced the indigenous idols with Catholic saints, and initiated a long process of revisionist iconography for the indians from one source to another. The llama, as an animal that closely (to the indians) resembled humans in their social interactions, acted as a replacement for the human sacrificial victim; this helped ease the sacrificial rituals into a more acceptable Christian realm of possibilities. The origin myth, with its "multiple, not unique" origins was contentious; although re-reading and appropriating the Christ-like image of Tunupa, and the "great flood" and "tower of Babel" stories, led to a deeper understanding by colonial powers in the religion of their subjugated workers. The historical grounding in colonial documents led to a deeper, richer, fuller picture of present-day ethnography. I think this method serves to illuminate so many elements in everyday life that seem otherwise "meaningless" or where pre-literate peoples have not developed a "linear" sense of history, as their colonizers encouraged. The ability to recreate, from historical documents, a more complete view of indigenous concepts about space, time, self, and history, is invaluable. It strikes me as a process of reading "through" (not between) the lines of the colonial texts-into the minds of the colonizers-in a way that is instructive in both the development of colonial systems for creation of dominant ideologies, and how the indigenous people actual recreated their colonizers through an adaptation of their habit-memories into a new (world) context.

*Pathways of Memory and Power* crosses the disciplinary boundary where anthropology and history meet, exploring the cultural frontier of the colonial and postcolonial Andes. Thomas A. Abercrombie uses his fieldwork in the Aymara community of Santa Barbara de Culta, Bolivia, as a starting point for his ambitious examination of the relations between European forms of historical consciousness and indigenous Andean ways of understanding the past. Writing in an inviting first-person narrative style, Abercrombie confronts the ethics of fieldwork by comparing ethnographic experience to the power-laden contexts that produce historical sources. Making clear the early and deep intermingling of practices and world views among Spaniards and Andeans, Christians and non-Christians, Abercrombie critiques both the romanticist tendency to regard Andean culture as still separate from and resistant to European influences, and the melodramatic view that all indigenous practices have been obliterated by colonial and national elites. He challenges prejudices that, from colonial days to the present, have seen Andean historical knowledge only in mythic narratives or narratives of personal experience. Bringing an ethnographers approach to historiography, he shows how complex Andean rituals that hybridize European and indigenous traditions such as libation dedications and llama sacrifices held on saints day festivals are in fact potent evidence of social memory in the community.