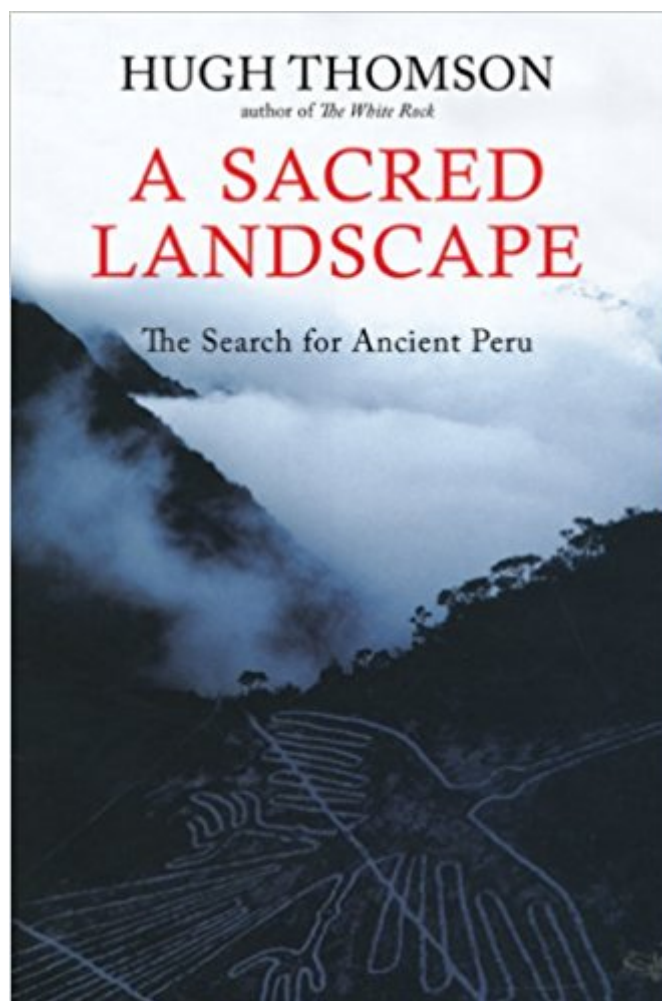


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A Sacred Landscape The Search For Ancient Peru



Synopsis

Many of the extraordinary cultures of Ancient Peru, from the lines of the Nasca to the temple-cult of Chavín and the great pyramids of the coast, have only started to give up their secrets in just the last few years. Hugh Thompson has been at the forefront of some of these discoveries. He made headlines with his work near Machu Picchu, which he recounted brilliantly in *The White Rock*. Now he takes the reader on a journey back from the great Moche pyramids to remote sites in the Central highlands that date back to the first millennium BCE--ancient Incan sites of the Andes that remain cloaked in mystery. Thompson gives an immensely personal and accessible guide to the region's wonders alongside the story of his family's relocation to a farm in the Yucay valley, the one-time heartland of ancient Peru. Drawing on the year that he spent alongside contemporary Peruvians, Thompson illuminates how things have changed--or failed to change--in the five centuries that separate contemporary Peru from the civilization that is one of the world's oldest and most captivating enigmas.

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Customer Reviews

After traveling across Peru for more than two decades, writer and documentary filmmaker Thomson (*The White Rock*, 2003) began discerning unexpected connections between distant monumental ruins. An amiable and erudite guide, he provides a clarifying overview of Andean scholarship much as Wade Davis did for the Inca in *One River* (1996), along with vivid descriptions of astronomically oriented buildings and powerful artworks, some sexually explicit, others grotesque depictions of human sacrifice. Always looking to the landscape for clues, Thomson theorizes that these bloody

rites were aimed at deflecting natural disasters, especially a lack of freshwater and radical climate change, predicaments sadly relevant to our time. His feet-on-the-ground approach and alertness to the significance of textiles and pilgrim routes in decoding the purpose of ancient constructions also yield a fresh take on the famous geoglyphs of Nasca, the immense line drawings of birds and animals viewable only from the air. Anecdotal and instructive as he weaves together lively profiles, tales from arduous explorations, and carefully weighted insights, Thomson creates an encompassing vision of the complex cosmologies of pre-Columbian Andean civilizations. Seaman, Donna --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"A dizzying tour through five turbulent millennia. The cumulative effect is enthralling." -- The Times
"Conveys not only Thompson's great knowledge of the ancient civilizations of the Andes, but also the thrill of the chase for such knowledge." -- The Spectator

So many people just focus on Machu Picchu and the Sacred Valley. This book journeys all across the Peruvian landscape visiting some known and some not-so-known treasures/historical sites in Peru. As always in his books, the reader learns history, the cultural landscape of the time when Thomson was writing, observes Thomson's inner and outer landscape and insights (love those nuggets), and comes away with a greater understanding of the history and culture he is describing. My favorite chapter was the one on Caral. And the anecdote of seeing Star Wars in Spanish is great! This book gave me a deeper appreciation for Peru and for the way its ancient people wove "reciprocity" into the land and culture, how in some areas, that concept was lost to them, but was always there whether known, practiced, or abandoned.

This book was recommended to me prior to a trip to Peru. I didn't get to it before my trip but rather read it afterwards and it was excellent, especially after having been to some of the same or similar places and having a sense of place while reading. Without summarizing Thomson weaves a wonderful picture of Precolumbian Peru, a complicated series of civilizations whose rise and fall are as often environmentally driven, in this harsh land, as they are a series of conquests. The remains of these civilizations dot the Peruvian landscape both coastal and Andean and form a lush sense of human continuity over the millennia. Before I left for Peru I read the newer book Turn Right at Machu Picchu and thoroughly enjoyed it. Both books added so much to my literary enjoyment of the land and the people. If you are looking for an excellent historical and archaeological picture of ancient Peru, this is it. If you're planning a trip this is a great book either before you leave and if you don't

get to it, pick it up upon returning home, it will take you back and enrich the totality of the experience.

I've read two or three of his books... helped me research my off-the-beaten trail treks I did while living in Peru and Bolivia for 15 months. Wonderful reads and extremely informative.

Hugh Thomson's "A Sacred Landscape: The Search for Ancient Peru" is enjoyable reading from end to end of its 286 pages, which include nice maps and lots of photos. He has written in the first person, which adds to the pleasure of the read. The book is loaded with first-hand accounts of archaeological sites, along with personalized interviews and discussions with Andeanists, both scientific and adventurer types. We learned a lot about the recent re-discovery of Llactapata, the extraordinary archaeological site that lies 2.5 miles southwest of Machu Picchu proper. Thomson describes his work and the work of his colleagues at Llactapata in evocative detail; it makes you feel as if you were there swinging a machete. In particular, you get a good feel for explorer Gary Ziegler and Archaeo-astronomer Kim Malville, both of whom are from Colorado. Thomson also does a good job at describing earlier visits to Llactapata by Hiram Bingham, Johan Reinhard, and himself from over the last 100 years, and how these hurried visits had done little to really define the site. One reason why the book would be of special interest to archaeologists is that Thomson describes encounters with well-known Andean personalities and then goes on to give verbal sketches of their personalities and their strengths and weaknesses without pulling punches. You will find stories about Gordon McEwan, Jonathan Haas, Ruth Shady, Tom Zuidema, Gary Ziegler, Gary Urton, John Hemming, Richard Burger, Johan Reinhard, and many more. It is fun reading. One treat was Thomson's 10-page report on meeting with Gordon McEwan at Chokepukio that is just down valley a short distance from Cusco. The site is nicely described, but Thomson states it was a Wari site when it was actually pre-Wari, Wari, post-Wari, and then an Inca site. This problem, however, does not detract from his report. "A Sacred Landscape..." joins Thomson's earlier book, "The White Rock", in setting a standard on how to write about Andean archaeology in a manner that sells books and provides a glimpse of ancient Peru for the armchair traveler, serious tourist, and for those with a scientific bent.

Hugh Thomson has continued his well researched and well written adventure into understanding ancient Peru which he began in his earlier work, the "The White Rock". The previous reviewer gives some specific examples of Mr. Thomson's research, so I will focus on why this book is rated 5

stars. Hugh Thomson has written a very high quality narrative and has woven archeological and historical research into his own search for understanding the Incas. I recommend this book for anyone who wants to better understand the history of the Americas, the spiritual development of ancient peoples and the tragedy of the Spanish Conquest. It is also excellent for anyone who wonders what it is like to journey in the Andes.

First of all let me say that once you start reading, if you are interested in the subject matter, you will not be able to put down the book. Mr. Thomson writes about the great and mysterious civilizations of ancient Peru with great knowledge and passion. It is evident the love for what he does and I loved how fair and balanced is his coverage of history in the making through archeology. Also the book has plenty of heart, it reads like an adventure story and the characters are all fabulous. And even though the author resists the "spiritual" interpretations of the ancient buildings, the author seems to have a transformation of sorts at the end, the description of climbing the snowy mountain and witness the dances and celebrations at dawn is just magical. The only personal feedback I would have for the author is to slow down with the drinking! We want to be around for a while! It stood out a bit too much how he likes his booze and at some point it became distracting from the narrative. I will definitely follow this author and look for his other books.

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