



Moon, Sun and Witches

Irene Marsha Silverblatt

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When the Spanish arrived in Peru in 1532, men of the Inca Empire worshipped the Sun as Father and their dead kings as ancestor heroes, while women venerated the Moon and her daughters, the Inca queens, as founders of female dynasties. In the pre-Inca period such notions of parallel descent were expressions of complementarity between men and women. Examining the interplay between gender ideologies and political hierarchy. Irene Silverblatt shows how Inca rulers used their Sun and Moon traditions as methods of controlling women and the Andean peoples the Incas conquered. She then explores the process by which the Spaniards employed European male and female imageries to establish their own rule in Peru and to make new inroads on the power of native women, particularly poor peasant women.

Harassed economically and abused sexually, Andean women fought back, earning in the process the Spaniards' condemnation as "witches." Fresh from the European witch hunts that damned women for susceptibility to heresy and diabolic influence, Spanish clerics were predisposed to charge politically disruptive poor women with witchcraft. Professor Silverblatt shows that these very accusations provided women with an ideology of rebellion and a method for defending their culture.

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