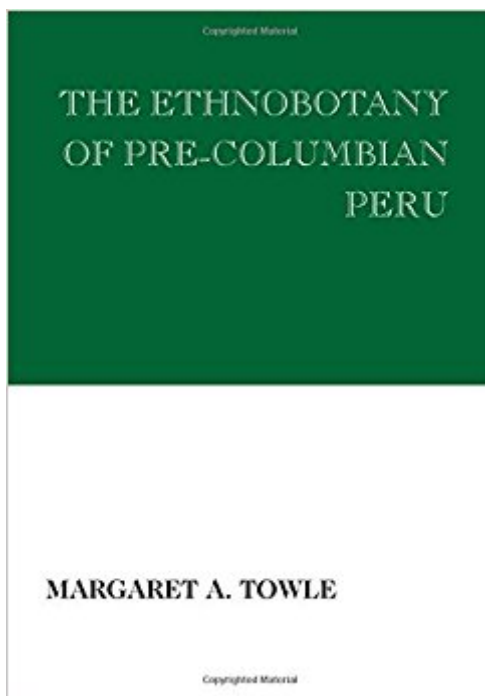


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# The Ethnobotany Of Pre-Columbian Peru



## Synopsis

All of man's life is in some way associated with the plant world, from his food and shelter to his art, religion and language. The study of this all-pervading relationship between man and the plant world is called ethnobotany. This book provides a systematic reconstruction of the ethnobotany of one of the hearths of American civilization, in the prehistoric cultures of the Peruvian Central Andes.

As we learn more about the rise and spread of New World agriculture, it becomes evident that Peru was one of the sources of its development. Plants were cultivated here at least 2,000 years before the beginning of the Christian era. Village life was intimately bound up with this cultivation, later civilizations rested upon it as a foundation, and from Peru agriculture was diffused to other parts of the Americas. Towle bases her work on the evidence of plant remains found in archeological sites, surveys of botanical and ethnological literature, and field studies of modern plant utilization. After a methodological and historical introduction, she proceeds to a systematic listing of plant species, each fully described. She then presents the ethnobotanical data for each of the cultural-geographic divisions of the area, giving a chronological picture of the use of wild and cultivated plants against a background of the cultures of which they were part. A summary of the evolutionary trends in the region as a whole is followed by a full bibliography and index. The book contains fifteen pages of plates. Margaret A. Towle (1902-1985) received her doctorate from Columbia University in 1958 and was research fellow in ethnobotany in the Botanical Museum of Harvard University.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Margaret Towle’s basic data are derived primarily from archaeological sources.

However, she further strengthens the archaeologically derived evidence through critical reference to pertinent historical, ethnological and botanical literature. The book contains fifteen pages of plates and more than eight pages of bibliography. The documentation is excellent throughout. The Ethnobotany of Pre-Columbian Peru should be particularly helpful to the archaeologist interested in field identification of plant remains. In addition, this book is a "must" for all those interested in the prehistory of Peru and/or the history of plant domestication throughout the world.

• Ronald Provencher, *Ethnohistory* "This is a very useful publication. [A]nyone working on Peru will find it indispensable."

• G. H. S. Bushnell, *Man* "This study is based on analysis of 2200 wild and cultivated plant specimens with clearly defined archaeological contexts. Part I is a systematic ethnobotany with pertinent citations of the botanical and archaeological literature, and includes a list of plants according to their uses. Part II is a chronological and regional treatment of plants integrated with useful summaries of the archaeological contexts from which the plants came. This section enables the reader to view the course of plant domestication from the states of premaize, incipient agriculture to the stage of intensive agriculture when some 50 cultivated plants were utilized. The story of this development is still far from complete, and many problems of origin, including the origin of Peruvian types of maize, remain to be solved. But this study is an important contribution to that story and will be extremely useful to archaeologists and ethnobotanists."

• Donald Collier, *American Scientist* "This book contains a systematic compilation of records of plants from pre-Columbian archaeological sites in Peru together with some unpublished observations made by the author."

• T. C. Whitmore, *Journal of Ecology* "This monographic study of the plants on which the Incas and their predecessors based their culture was undertaken by Margaret A. Towle at the Botanical Museum of Harvard University with collections turned over to her for the purpose from Columbia University, the American Museum of Natural History and the Peabody Museum of Harvard University. The monograph has a short summary, and an excellent and detailed index. There is a map and a chronological diagram of the cultures and subcultures."

• Edgar Anderson, *American Journal of Archaeology* "Towle's book not only fills a long need for a summary of useful plants of pre-Columbian Peru, but will aid anyone who wants to study plants today in fields and markets, wherever Indian cultures persist, from Mexico to central Chile. She has done an excellent job of identifying difficult materials and surveying a scattered literature notable for errors in identification of plant materials."

• Hugh Cutler, *American Antiquity* "The considerable information that has been accumulated on pre-Columbian ethnobotany in Peru has been largely

made possible by the extreme aridity of coastal Peru. Towle has given us an excellent summary account of plants and plant uses in pre-Columbian Peru. As such, it should be of much interest to biologists concerned with economic plants and their origins and relationships to native New World agriculture.

Margaret A. Towle (1902-1985) received her doctorate from Columbia University in 1958 and was research fellow in ethnobotany in the Botanical Museum of Harvard University.

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