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**People of the Sacred Mountain: A History of the Northern Cheyenne Chiefs and Warrior Societies, 1830-1879; with an epilogue, 1964-1974.** By Father Peter John Powell. (New York: Harper and Row, 1981. 1441 pp. \$125. Cloth.

This is an unusual kind of history--a sacred history in which an event is interpreted as seen through the eyes of a Plains Indian people whose story "has been and continues to be lived in a world filled with supernatural power" (preface).\* It is told by a priest long associated with Indian people, one who was adopted into a Northern Cheyenne family and appointed honorary chief of the Northern Cheyenne tribe, and whose own spiritual life has become inextricable from Cheyenne belief and culture.

The story is preeminently one of military encounter and negotiation. Father Powell tells it as Cheyennes do, focusing on individual warriors, holy men and chiefs, but always careful to place them in their tribal context, identifying them as to band, military society and relatives. Much of the early warfare Powell describes is inter-tribal with the Cheyennes' greatest enemies, the Crow and the Pawnee. Most inter-tribal conflict did not involve the whole tribe: small war parties sought to accumulate "coups" ("war honors" as they are called today), avenge previous wrongs or steal horses from the enemy. Participation in such war or raiding parties was voluntary, although the warriors looked to a leader for advice concerning the tactics of a particular battle. Such small, voluntary war parties were inappropriate to warfare with federal troops, however, to whom victory seemed to imply conquest or extermination.

As the Whites, regardless of continual assurances to the contrary, encroached more and more on Cheyenne lands and lifeway, warfare ceased to be just one facet of tribal life and became crucial to physical and cultural survival. Father Powell carefully chronicles the resulting shift in tribal organization: the military societies grew in power while the the chiefs--demeaned and discouraged by persistent White subversion of their peacemaking efforts--saw their own authority steadily decline. The position of council chief became essentially an honorary one while the military

society leaders retained considerable authority even to the present day.

In the end, this is a story of suffering and defeat. To the Cheyennes themselves this was all prefigured in two great spiritual disasters. First, in 1830 the Pawnees stole the Sacred Arrows. The theft resulted in a disruption of the flow of the Creator's power to the Cheyenne people: misfortune was inevitable. Powell's account begins with the loss of the Arrows and shows that thereafter the Cheyennes began to suffer more not only from intertribal conflict but--by the middle of the century--from disease ("Half the Southern People Die" is the title of the chapter about cholera), extermination of the buffalo by White hunters and direct assault by White soldiers.

Around 1872 a second spiritual disaster--this one concerning the Sacred Hat--presaged further tragedy. The wife of Broken Dish, disputed Keeper of the Hat, mutilated the Hat in her anger over its being given to another, more appropriate Keeper. The end of freedom for the Northern Cheyennes and the suffering associated with their flight from Oklahoma soon followed. The two sacred bundles were the essence of the Creator's blessing to his Chosen Cheyenne People. Defiled and distanced, their power was broken.

The story ends with a kind of despair in 1879. The old way is gone; the new is one of compromise and surrender. But the author sees a new hope and a new vitality in the People today and wants to conclude with optimism rather than despair. It is in part this goal that motivates the problematic "Epilogue" in which he enthusiastically endorses the establishment and activities of the Northern Cheyenne Research and Human Development Association, Inc., an organization the Cheyennes heavily criticize today.

The Association arose in 1973 to provide Native leadership, especially concerning the new threat to Northern Cheyenne lands from coal and oil development. It sponsored two controversial ceremonies, description of which is the basis of the Epilogue. The author participated in both ceremonies himself. The first was a renewal of the Forty-Four chiefs in a ceremony held (inappropriately,

according to many) within the Sacred Hat tipi--without the essential chiefs' bundle of sacred items which had been buried in the hills because no one was considered worthy of keeping it. The second ceremony was the "return" of the Sacred Hat to the Sacred Mountain for its renewal and repair. But the Sacred Hat could not return to the Sacred Mountain: it did not come from there. Moreover, since no one was fully qualified to open the Hat bundle, some view the "renewal" as a cheapening compromise of the Hat.

Many Northern Cheyennes have already had the opportunity to see Father Powell's new book, thanks largely to the author himself, who, besides sharing royalties equally with the Tribe, has donated copies to individuals and institutions on the reservation. Although some of the women will never read this final chapter--it contains photographs of items traditionally forbidden for women to see--some Cheyennes who have read the "Epilogue" voice strong objections to it.

Native criticism is, however, limited to this one chapter. In the rest of this exceptional work the Cheyennes find a narrative that includes stories they have already heard about people who are their relatives and places which are important to their lives. Powell's work answers a definite need: it is the only history of the military societies and chiefs, each fundamental to the Cheyenne Way.

The book is both for and about Cheyenne people. It is a special gift to them and to those specifically interested in Plains Indian history and culture. For others it offers a unique opportunity to understand events (many of which are already familiar: the gold rush, the extermination of the buffalo, the Sand Creek massacre, the Little Big Horn, the establishment of reservations in Indian Territory) from a Native perspective,\* to experience the clash of cultures as well as the clash of soldiers.

Cheyenne accounts provide the primary data for the book: non-Cheyenne sources appear only where there was no Cheyenne-derived material. Powell meticulously documents all sources. Consistent with its focus on Cheyenne sources, the text is beautifully-illustrated with 77 color plates of Cheyenne "ledger art" (so named because the drawings were often done in government ledger books by Indian artists in

prison or on the reservation. Other illustrations in this limited edition are early photographs of Cheyenne leaders, the location and identification of which was in itself a tremendous undertaking.

There is only one map--a non-Cheyenne document but essential to those not intimately familiar with the area--and it is hidden behind the footnotes at the end of Volume I. The extensive index clearly reflects the major emphases of the book. It is divided into sections, the first of which concerns the spiritual life of the People, and the longest of which lists each of the individuals the text mentions, including first the Cheyennes (chiefs, warriors, keepers of the covenants and women), then their allies, and finally their enemies. The last section indexes "Places on Grandmother Earth Important to the Peoples' History". There is as well a good "General Index."

The impressive breadth of data, the meticulous scholarship, the narrative format, the scrupulous attention to detail, the rare and remarkable illustrations, and the incorporation of personal experience all attest to the author's unique background. As priest, anthropologist, historian, Father Powell has presented a history informed with culture and belief--a sacred history which interprets events as they were meaningful to those\* who actually experienced them, the People of the Sacred Mountain.

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\* Father Powell is not a Cheyenne but an honorary Cheyenne Chief <Ed.>.