

The Inka Empire stretched over much of the length and breadth of the South American Andes, encompassed elaborately planned cities linked by a complex network of roads and messengers, and created astonishing works of architecture and artistry and a compelling mythology - all without the aid of a graphic writing system. Instead, the Inkas records consisted of devices made of knotted and dyed strings - called khipu - on which they recorded information pertaining to the organisation and history of their empire. Despite more than a century of research on these remarkable devices, the khipu remain largely un-deciphered. In this benchmark book, thirteen international scholars tackle the most vexed question in khipu studies: how did the Inkas record and transmit narrative records by means of knotted strings? The authors approach the problem from a variety of angles. Several essays mine Spanish colonial sources for details about the kinds of narrative encoded in the khipu. Others look at the uses to which khipu were put before and after the Conquest, as well as their current use in some contemporary Andean communities. Still others analyze the formal characteristics of khipu and seek to explain how they encode various kinds of numerical and narrative data.

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