

ABOUT THE SERIES

Latin America Otherwise: Languages, Empires, Nations is a critical series. It aims to explore the emergence and consequences of concepts used to define “Latin America” while at the same time exploring the broad interplay of political, economic, and cultural practices that have shaped Latin American worlds. Latin America, at the crossroads of competing imperial designs and local responses, has been construed as a geocultural and geopolitical entity since the nineteenth century. This series provides a starting point to redefine Latin America as a configuration of political, linguistic, cultural, and economic intersections that demands a continuous reappraisal of the role of the Americas in history, and of the ongoing process of globalization and the relocation of people and cultures that have characterized Latin America’s experience. *Latin America Otherwise: Languages, Empires, Nations* is a forum that confronts established geocultural constructions, that rethinks area studies and disciplinary boundaries, that assesses convictions of the academy and of public policy, and that, correspondingly, demands that the practices through which we produce knowledge and understanding about and from Latin America be subject to rigorous and critical scrutiny.

The Incas were a great mystery—at least according to many Western pundits who could not understand how a complex, highly stratified empire, stretching from southern Colombia to northwest Argentina, with a road system larger than Rome’s and a political organization that incorporated millions—could have existed without a “true” or European-like system of writing and accounting. The Incas’ closest instrument was the *quipu*—a set of knotted cords that served, in ways we hardly understand, as the nerve system of an empire.

One frontier of Andean scholarship today is trying to making sense of the khipu, and Frank Salomon's exciting book is a pioneering contribution to the field. Salomon's curiosity was piqued when he noted that village leaders in Tupicocha, a community in the central Peruvian Andes, proudly wore khipus as a badge of civic authority. While these men couldn't decipher their khipus' meanings, they did offer Salomon their historical knowledge. The result of this exchange, along with an exploration into other khipu legacies, is an intriguing investigation into these knotted cords and their contexts of use over a period of four centuries. Significantly, Salomon, in the process, challenges us to reexamine our own assumptions about the relation between writing and "civilization" as well as about the nature of "writing" itself.