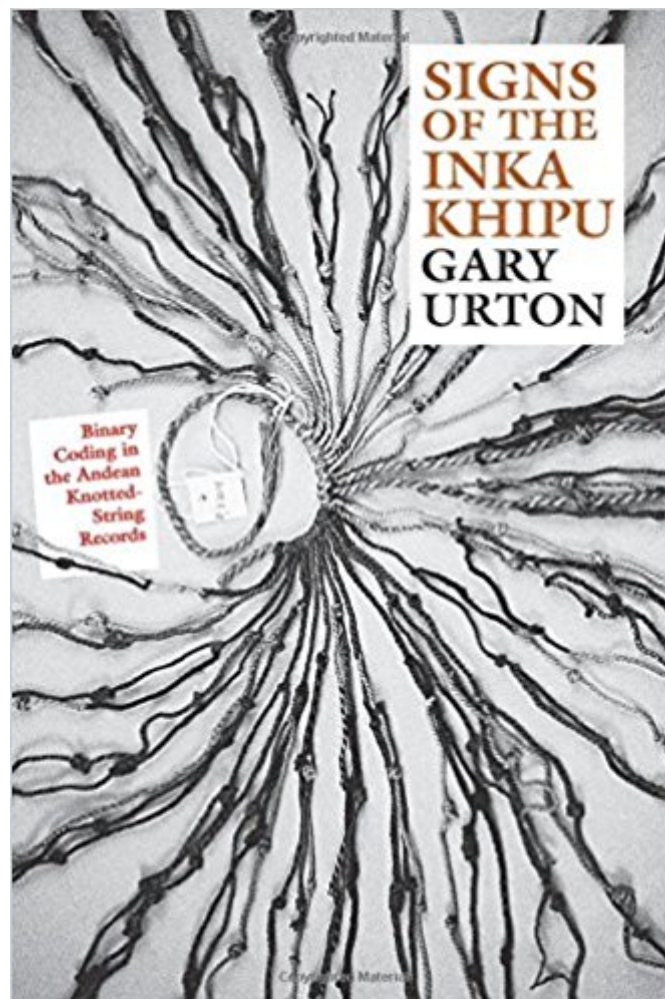The book was found

Signs Of The Inka Khipu: Binary Coding In The Andean Knotted-String Records (Linda Schele Series In Maya And Pre-Columbian Studies)

Synopsis

In an age when computers process immense amounts of information by the manipulation of sequences of 1s and 0s, it remains a frustrating mystery how prehistoric Inka recordkeepers encoded a tremendous variety and quantity of data using only knotted and dyed strings. Yet the comparison between computers and khipu may hold an important clue to deciphering the Inka records. In this book, Gary Urton sets forth a pathbreaking theory that the manipulation of fibers in the construction of khipu created physical features that constitute binary-coded sequences which store units of information in a system of binary recordkeeping that was used throughout the Inka empire.Urton begins his theory with the making of khipu, showing how at each step of the process binary, either/or choices were made. He then investigates the symbolic components of the binary coding system, the amount of information that could have been encoded, procedures that may have been used for reading the khipu, the nature of the khipu signs, and, finally, the nature of the khipu recording system itselfÃ¢ ¬â •emphasizing relations of markedness and semantic coupling. This research constitutes a major step forward in building a unified theory of the khipu system of information storage and communication based on the sum total of construction features making up these extraordinary objects.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Urton's work is scholarly and painstakingly thorough and is a valuable contribution to our understanding of Inca inscription that makes good use of ethnographic and ethnohistorical work on

the Andean region." (The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute)"This is by far the most important monograph on Andean systems of information registry since the AshersÃ¢â¬â„¢ volumes in the late 1970s. Urton provides a platform for a whole new generation of studies." (Frank Salomon, Professor of Anthropology, University of WisconsinÃ¢â¬âœMadison)

The comments (above) by one of Dr. Urton's more renowned colleagues make clear what Urton himself says in his review below: that this is not meant to be the definitive answer on an extremely difficult and meaningful topic. The very idea (that needed championing by Somebody, ubiquitous as it is in the chronicles) that the khipukuna were more than simple numerical record-keepers is revolutionary to our understanding of Andean culture and-- more importantly-- to our appreciation of the vast diversity and creativity of human kind. It is stirring to think of the simple metaphorical qualities of a so-called writing system that involves the act of weaving elements together-- creation-- versus our unconscious sense of writing as marking something (i.e., making a mark, impressing into, imposing upon, etc.). This concept is a great entry point to understanding pristine Andean civilization and to really swallowing the fact that Andean society was and is so vastly different from our own in science, art, technology, and just plain Consciousness, period.Though a recompilation of scattered information prevails throughout a large portion of the book, for the new-comer or simply for the lay person (like myself) who has little access to the wide range of journals and reviews from which information can be drawn, the plain fact of having all this data in one place is of great importance. Dr. Urton's suggestions for the future are also welcome starting points.Now, everyone from mathematicians to code-breakers to ethnohistorians can easily jump on board this incredible ship of discovery and, if nothing else, challenge the inherent European prejudice and arrogance that for too long prevailed in the study of Andean culture. No small accomplishment indeed.Truthfully, I write this review for selfish reasons as well, as I am trying to contact Dr. Urton, and think perhaps he will check in here some time. Until now it has been hard to do so, as I live in Cusco, Peru, studying on an amateur scale what Gary got his doctorate in. Thanks.

As the author of this book, it is obviously inappropriate for me to assign a ranking to the book. However, I cannot post this "review," which is in fact a rejoinder to the one existing review without a

rating; thus, I assign the book a high ranking (4 stars), as all things can be improved upon. The one existing review of my book so significantly distorts and misrepresents the contents of the book that a reply is in order. First, my theory does not assign seven yes/no aspects to each knot. Rather there are seven different binary decisions reflected in the construction of each knot, each decision of which has its own, unique contents and character (i.e., they're not yes/no; rather, they're right/left, over/under, etc.). Thus, my analogy to binary coding is just that, an analogy that is used to give the reader a general understanding of the type of system that is proposed. Second, some information may be shared by knots on the same string; these may be like species of a genus, and thus, we cannot, as the reviewer does, reject out of hand a system that contains some level of redundancy. Third (and related to point two), the reviewer suggests that we run these configurations off to see if the "resulting distributions are something that could actually be an informational representation." But who will determine what constitutes an actual informational representation in a system that we are, as yet, unable to read? Fourth, the reviewer states that I have not provided even one real example of a decoding. This is untrue; see the decoding of a Chachapoyas khipu provided on pp. 129-132 and in Table 5.1. And finally, the reviewer says that my notion that some (not "all" as he would have it) readings may have been performed by way of noting the pattern of decisions in contrasting colored stones is a "strange hypothesis." This is, however, precisely how this message was produced -- i.e., by a series of eight-bit , off/on signals that are converted into English language script. As I note in the book, what we lack in the coding of the khipu is an understanding of the way the coded information was translated into the message that was read off by the khipu reader. As clearly and repeatedly stated in the book, the theory of binary coding is put forward in this book in an attempt to find some new way(s) of working with these devices to move us to a new level of analysis and, hopefully, understanding.

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