

The Department of Anthropology 2011-2012 Colloquium Series presents

*The Andes' Lost Script, and Anthropology's
Lost Knack for Reading Things*



Frank Salomon

Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison,
and Adjunct Professor at the University of Iowa

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2:30 P.M.

27 Macbride Hall

The khipu, a pre-Columbian Andean technology for recording information on cords, remains one of the world's most intractable "lost script" problems. Although recent years brought important new findings about the 600-odd prehispanic extant specimens, the basic graphic principle remains in dispute: a syllabography? A semasiography or "writing without words"? A nonspecific data protocol? A device for operable modeling? Ethnographic study of khipus suggests that the medium represents a path to complex registry never taken in the evolution of so-called true writings. The case reminds us that "proto-writings," "picture-writing," and so forth were once embraced as vital studies for anthropology, in (for example) North America, interior Australia, Panama, and West Africa. Thrown out with the unilineal bathwater, the infant anthropological study of graphic behavior in general now seems important to give the humanities scope beyond the traditional academic rubric of "letters."

Frank Salomon is the John V. Murra Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Adjunct Professor at the University of Iowa. An ethnographer and ethnohistorian of the Andes, he is the author of *Native Lords of Quito in the Age of the Incas* (1986), *The Huarochiri Manuscript, a Testament of Ancient and Colonial Andean Religion* (1991), *Los Yumbos, Niguas, y Tsáchila o "Colorados" durante la colonia española* (1997), the *Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas – South America* (1999), *The Cord Keepers* (2004), *La revisita de 1588: Huarochiri veinte años antes de "Dioses y hombres"* (2010), and *The Lettered Mountain* (with Mercedes Niño-Murcia, forthcoming in 2011). A past president of the American Society for Ethnohistory, he has held NSF, Guggenheim, SAR, and NSF fellowships. His articles on indigenous media and language include "Names and Peoples in Post-Incaic Quito" (1986). His current researches concern the survival of the *khipu* (Andean knotted-cord script) into modernity.

This talk is co-sponsored by Latin American Studies Program.

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