

THE POETICS OF *KHIPU* HISTORIOGRAPHY:
Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala's *Nueva corónica*
and the *Relación de los quipucamayos*

Galen Brokaw*

State University of New York at Buffalo

By these knots they counted the successions of the times and when each Inca ruled, the children he had, if he was good or bad, valiant or cowardly, with whom he was married, what lands he conquered, the buildings he constructed, the service and riches he received, how many years he lived, where he died, what he was fond of; in sum, everything that books teach and show us was got from there.¹

Martín de Murúa

Abstract: The Andean khipu was a medium of colored knotted cords used to record different types of information in the pre-Columbian and colonial periods. Although currently there is no way to read the khipu that have survived, numerous texts written in the colonial period claim to have relied on khipu as sources of information. A comparison between two khipu transcriptions of Inca biographies on the one hand and the European biographical genre on the other reveal a distinctly Andean poetics—in the sense of a structural format—with very suggestive links to semiotic conventions of the khipu.

INTRODUCTION

The Andean *khipu* is one of the most perplexing elements of indigenous Andean society. This device of colored, knotted strings has intrigued European observers from the first stages of contact through the present. Although currently approximately 600 *khipu* are known to have

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1. This and all other translations that appear in this article are my own. In many cases, I have sacrificed eloquence and grammatical consistency in an attempt to reflect the nature of the Spanish discourse to the degree possible. For the original Spanish text of this passage, see note 27.

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survived, the knowledge of how to read them has been lost, and exactly what kind of information they hold and the nature of their semiotic function have been subjects of considerable debate. One of the questions that colonial chroniclers attempted to answer about the *kipu* was whether or not it constituted writing, and much of the debate today centers around the same issue. Based on a selective and literal interpretation of colonial sources and a limited understanding of archaeological specimens, many scholars have argued that the *kipu* was not writing but rather a mnemonic device similar to a rosary. In the early twentieth century, Leland Locke combined for the first time a systematic survey of colonial records with a detailed analysis of actual *kipu* (Locke 1923). Locke reinforced the same conclusions presumably reached by many colonial chroniclers: that the *kipu* was merely numeric in nature, and may have functioned as a mnemonic aid for more complex oral accounts. However, our understanding of the *kipu* as a semiotic medium is far from complete (Urton 1994, 294), and sufficient ambiguity, contradiction, and general ignorance exist in the colonial chronicles to reject any simple interpretation of statements made in such documents. More recently, Marcia Ascher and Robert Ascher have catalogued almost 200 *kipu* with detailed descriptions of each based on a common format and analytic studies of their semiotic potential (Ascher and Ascher 1978, 1981). Contrary to what Locke maintained, Ascher and Ascher argue that the *kipu* is perfectly capable of encoding detailed information, including narratives.

One of the principal difficulties in assessing the function of the *kipu* is not only a lack of information but also the disparity between European and Andean cultural modes of thought and representation (Arellano 1999; M. Ascher 1986; Jara 1970; Prada Ramírez 1995, 11; Quispe Agnoli 2002; Urton 2002). The cognitive negotiation involved in the dialogic interaction between the acquisition of any secondary form of representation (i.e., alphabetic or *kipu* literacy) and the development of institutions that support it influences the way a culture conceives of the signifying functions that it employs. Part of the problem is that the writing-orality opposition that tacitly underlies most discussions of the *kipu* is problematic in this case (Arellano 1999; Quispe Agnoli 2002).² Furthermore, the definition of writing itself is seldom questioned. Before such issues can be resolved, or perhaps dismissed as irrelevant or unproductive, the nature of *kipu* semiosis must be understood.

In addition to the study of the archaeological *kipu* themselves, one of the most productive approaches to understanding the *kipu* has been the analysis of documents that contain information originally recorded on *kipu* (Murra 1968, 1981; Pärssinen 1992, 31–50; Rostworowski 1990;

2. See also Boone (1994), Brotherston (1992), and Mignolo (1994, 1995).

Rowe 1985; Urton 1998). In most cases, these writings are tribute records that were recorded for official inspections (*visitas*) or for litigation in court cases, but there are also narrative accounts that claim to have relied on *kipu* sources. Such documents are what we might call, modifying Mary Louise Pratt's term and its definition, textual contact zones: textual spaces in which disparate modes of discourse meet, clash, and grapple with each other in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination.³ All forms of discourse, whether oral or written, are produced and received in the context of a genre or tradition (Bakhtin 1986; Foucault 1972), and they are tied in many ways to the medium used to convey them. In this case, there are two discursive forces and contexts that interact in the shaping of colonial documents derived from *kipu* sources: the Andean and the Spanish.

The content of these documents was originally articulated in an Andean context and through an Andean discourse linked in a dialogical relationship with Andean media (oral Quechua or Aymara and the *kipu*). In the Andean context, a distinction between a *kipu*-derived discourse and formal oral genres may not be justifiable. I would argue that the dialogic relationship between the structure of Andean discourses, Andean oral traditions, and the *kipu* was very different from the relationship between writing and orality in modern alphabetic cultures. It may be that the *kipu* was not used to record all forms of oral discourse, but all *kipu* were linked to one or another oral genre. Also, as with alphabetic writing, secondary systems never replace, nor are they opposed to, orality; rather they engage, supplement, and perhaps transform it (Goody 1987, 2000; McLuhan 1962; Olson and Torrance 1996; Ong 1982).

Two types of possible relationships exist between *kipu* and alphabetic texts from the colonial period that rely on *kipu* as sources of information. In the first case, close transcriptions of *kipu*, mostly tribute records, were composed for official reports. This transcription process involved the "reading" of the *kipu* in Quechua or Aymara by a *kipukamayuc*, the transcription of this oral discourse into alphabetic writing, and/or the translation of the indigenous language into alphabetic Spanish (Urton 1998, 412). In the second case, the *kipu* is not transcribed, but serves as a source of information either directly or indirectly. This is not to say that features of *kipu* textuality do not appear in such texts, but that their influence may be much more subtle. Europeans who claim to have relied on the *kipu* for information constructed histories that consciously participate in European discursive genres, and, perhaps unconsciously, obliterate or deculturate many of the features that

3. In *Imperial Eyes*, Mary Louise Pratt defines contact zones as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (Pratt 1992, 4).

characterized the original indigenous text. Even though these writers were not involved in the actual reading of *kipu*, the cohesiveness of indigenous discourses would have resisted the complete assimilation to European norms.

The extent to which *kipu* conventions survive the process of transpositioning depends upon the degree of similarity between European and Andean genres, the cultural identity of the writers, their degree of education in or familiarity with the textual forms involved, circumstances of production, ideology, and so on. As a product of an educated, native Spaniard with adequate quantities of paper and time to compose his history according to European standards, the nature and degree of *kipu* textuality in Martín de Murúa's *Historia general del Perú* (1611), for example, is much more limited than in more direct *kipu* transcriptions of tribute records and historical works allegedly transcribed directly from *kipu* like the *Discurso sobre la descendencia y gobierno de los Incas* (1542/1608) or produced directly by indigenous writers who claim to have relied on *kipu* sources like Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala's *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno* (c. 1615). If the writers or transcribers of these texts used *kipu* as a primary source of information as they claim, traces of the poetics—defined in the original sense as the structural principles of a discourse⁴—of the original *kipu* account should manifest themselves in observable ways.

Any discussion of the relationship between a *kipu* that no longer exists and its alphabetic translation/transcription is fraught with difficulties that stem from the lack of the original *kipu* text and our ignorance of the discursive conventions employed in different *kipu* genres. Unfortunately, the Spaniards were not as interested in the *kipu* as a material medium as they were in the Mesoamerican pictographic texts; *kipu* were not considered exotic, collectible items like the codices; nor were they preserved or studied in any great detail. With perhaps one exception (Urton 2001), no one has ever matched up a specific *kipu* to a specific alphabetic text. This makes it impossible to compare the meaning conveyed by an actual *kipu* text with that of an alphabetic one as can be done with a pictographic codex.

Our ignorance about how the *kipu* worked and its capabilities as a communicative medium,⁵ has, perhaps inevitably, caused discursive analyses to neglect the intertextual relationship between the *kipu* and

4. For a definition and discussion of poetics and its meanings, see Todorov (1977, 1981), or browse the issues of the journal *Poetics Today*.

5. There is no way to even know for sure if we have examples of all the different kinds/genres of *kipu* that existed in the pre-Hispanic and colonial periods. Indeed, some have argued that because almost all extant *kipu* come from graves, they may represent a very limited sampling of generic types.

the written texts that relied on them for information.⁶ At this point, the best that we can do is to attempt to identify and analyze alphabetic texts that are as close to direct transcriptions as possible. Studies of *kipu* transcriptions have been productive in several ways. In “Las etnocategorías de un *kipu* estatal,” for example, through an analysis of a *kipu* transcription of tribute records, John Murra was able to identify a set of ethno-categories that reveal a hierarchical structure according to which Andean society organizes the useful objects in the world around it (Murra 1981). This discovery may be directly related to *kipu* conventions identified as seriation (Altieri 1939; Radicati 1965), parallelism (Radicati 1965, 1979), format (M. Ascher 2002; Ascher and Ascher 1981, 81–107), patterns (Conklin 1982, 271; Mackey 1990, 154; Urton 1994), relations (Ascher and Ascher 1969, 1971), and structure (M. Ascher 2002). Furthermore, this hierarchical structure demonstrates that, in this case at least, the transcription process left intact a high degree of the structural integrity of the original *kipu* account. In the investigation of a *kipu*-linked historiographic genre, the existence of multiple alphabetic texts containing the same categories of information taken from different *kipu* sources would provide a basis for a comparison and contrast between these texts and similar European genres. I would argue that in this way, it may be possible to identify a trace of an Andean poetics that characterized the original texts before they were transcribed, translated, and transpositioned into alphabetic Spanish and assimilated—in the process of reception and/or production—into the closest equivalent European discursive paradigm. Two of the most promising texts in this regard are Guaman Poma’s *Nueva corónica* and the work known as the *Discurso de la descendencia y gobierno de los Incas* or the *Relación de los quipucamayos*.⁷

6. Soon after the conquest of New World territories such as what is now Mexico and Peru, Spanish officials began investigating indigenous customs, beliefs, and history. From the very beginning, the Mexican codices were recognized as important documents that recorded religious and historical information. The reaction to these documents, however, was ambivalent; most of them were burned, but the pictographic mode itself was incorporated into official documentation. The indigenous society of Peru, governed by the Incas at the time of the conquest, also had its own system of representation using *kipu*, but, unlike Mexican pictography, this medium was never accepted into the official record. In “Representation in the Sixteenth Century and the Colonial Image of the Inca,” Tom Cummins explains that European memory “is conditioned by mimetic images in terms of both *loci* and *imagines*, and this is what could be read into the Mexican pictorial manuscripts,” but “the same could not be inscribed into the *quipu*. . . . *Quipus* had no resonance with European forms, and while they were not categorized as creations of the devil, neither could they be adapted to simulate anything directly in the Spanish colonial system. Thus, the *quipu* was transcribed into a European form simply as an illustration or as a written text” (Cummins 1994, 194–95).

7. This text is also known as *Relación de la descendencia, gobierno y conquista de los Incas*.

TEXTS AND CONTEXTS

The *Nueva corónica* was written by Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala,⁸ an indigenous Andean whose father belonged to a non-Inca noble family from Huánuco that had served as *mitmaquna*, groups relocated by the Inca for royal service in newly conquered areas. He was born sometime after the conquest in Huamanga, present-day Ayacucho, and he died some time after 1615. Guaman Poma's work was inspired and motivated by a combination of his experience working in the colonial administration, his work for the chronicler Martín de Murúa, and a lengthy court battle over the rights to his family's land (Adorno 1993, 2001, 31–40). Although Guaman Poma relied extensively on European writings for some portions of his text (Adorno 1986; Cabos-Fontana 2000; Plas 1996), he also makes it very clear that his most important sources of information were “the *quipus* and memories and reports of ancient Indians” [*los quipos y memorias y relaciones de los yndios antiguos*] (Guaman Poma [1615] 1987, 8[8]).

Pierre Duviols suggests that claiming a *kipu* source was a way of garnering authority and attesting to the veracity of the text, and that as a common stylistic device, it was an innocent fraud (Duviols 1979, 589). I would argue, however, that the convention of identifying *kipu* sources is not as prominent as one would expect if it were seen as a guarantee of authenticity or truth. In any case, the fact that it became a common device from a reader's point of view does not mean that it did not reflect an actual relationship between *kipu* sources and alphabetic texts. The fact is that the *kipu* was an ubiquitous device employed throughout the Inca empire both before and after the conquest; the *kipukamayqs* (*kipu*-makers) were the people most likely to be interviewed by Spanish authorities and the most likely to be relied upon by indigenous writers. Guaman Poma's illustrations demonstrate that at the very least he had an intimate knowledge of how the *kipu* was handled and stored (Conklin 2002, 53). In the *Nueva corónica* Guaman Poma does not identify the specific information derived from *kipu* sources, but many chronicles reveal the different types of information stored on *kipu*. As a point of departure, the following analysis takes Guaman Poma at his word, and hypothesizes that much of the information about indigenous Andean history that appears in the *Nueva corónica* was collected either directly or indirectly from *kipu*.

The second Andean text that will figure in the analysis below, the *Discurso sobre la descendencia y gobierno de los Incas* (1542/1608), is more

8. I am fully aware of the controversy caused by the Naples documents, but for now I remain convinced that Guaman Poma was the author of the *Nueva corónica*. For a review of the controversy, see Albó (1998) and Cantú (2001).

explicit in terms of its relationship to *kipu* sources, but its provenience is at the same time more problematic. The work, which was signed in 1608 by a Fray Antonio, can be divided into two sections (Porrás Barrenechea [1952] 1986; Duviols 1979; Urton 1990, 44). The first section consists mainly of a history of the Inca kings allegedly based on transcriptions of *kipu* records during an inquest conducted by the viceroy Vaca de Castro in 1542 (Urteaga 1921, vi). The second section was probably written around 1608 and contains an account of the events leading up to and including the conquest. Raúl Porrás Barrenechea ([1952] 1986) and Duviols (1979) have raised questions about the accuracy and authenticity of this document. Porrás Barrenechea argues that the Fray Antonio who signed the manuscript is Fray Antonio Martínez, who lent support to legal petitions submitted by Don Melchor Carlos Inca (Porrás Barrenechea [1952] 1986, 749). The connection between these individuals is significant because, as Duviols demonstrates, the purpose of the *Discurso* was to establish two “facts,” which correspond to the two sections of the text: (1) Don Melchor Carlos Inca’s noble status as the legitimate heir of the Inca kings; and (2) the service rendered to the crown by Paullu Topa Inca, the grandfather of Don Melchor Carlos Inca (Duviols 1979). The text, then, is essentially a *probanza de méritos* (proof of merit) motivated by the possibility of receiving status and/or recompense from the king (*ibid.*, 587).

The portion of the text relevant for the analysis below is the first section containing the history of the Incas. According to the *Discurso*, the viceroy Cristóbal Vaca de Castro gathered together the oldest inhabitants of Cuzco and the surrounding area and asked them to give an account of their origins and history. The responses that he received varied greatly and often contradicted each other. Perceiving the frustration of the Spaniards, these *ancianos* (elders) suggested that they seek out the old *kipukamayusqs*. They explained that prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, Atahualpa had attempted to revise Inca history by burning all the *kipu* he could find and killing the *kipukamayusqs*. Those that escaped had been hiding in the mountains ever since. The viceroy sought out these *kipukamayusqs* and had them brought to Cuzco with their *kipu*. He then posed the questions to them, and had their accounts translated and transcribed.⁹

9. *Al tiempo que gobernó en este reino del Perú el Licenciado Vaca de Castro, pretendiendo con mucha solicitud saber la antigualla de los indios deste reino y el origen dellos, de los ingas, señores que fueron destes reinos, y si fueron naturales desta tierra o advenedizos de otras partes, para averiguación desta demanda, hizo juntar y parecer ante sí a todos los ingas viejos e antiguos del Cusco y de toda su comarca, e informándose dellos, como se pretendió, ninguno informó con satisfacción sino muy variablemente cada uno en derecho de su parte, sin saber dar otra razón más que todos los ingas fueron descendientes de Mango Capac, que fué el primero inga, sin saber dar otra razón más que todos los ingas fueron descendientes de Mango Capac, que fué el primer*

Theoretically, the motivation for this historical inquiry was to determine whether or not the Incas were natural lords, which would in turn validate or invalidate the right of the Spaniards to conquer and rule them. But Duviols argues that the colonial ideology of the Spaniards inevitably influenced the content of the document and the outcome of the inquiry (Duviols 1979, 589). The ideology and personal interests of the *Discurso*'s author would have also influenced the production of his own version. Although the original context of production as portrayed in the document may be accurate, the version we have today was filtered through several processes: (1) transcription into alphabetic script of an oral "reading" of a *kipu* record; (2) translation from Quechua into Spanish; (3) modification by the ideology of Spanish conquest—in this case that of the 1540s or perhaps the 1580s; and (4) further modification influenced by a combination of changing colonial and indigenous ideologies and the personal interests of the author—here, probably Don Melchor Carlos Inca or someone allied with him in the early 1600s.

I will discuss the ideology that informed the *Discurso* in more detail below, but these processes impinge upon the production of practically all texts produced by Spaniards or native Andeans who rely on *kipukamayuc* informants. Duviols's concern is with the truth value of the information contained in the *Discurso* or the degree of correspondence between the information that appears in this document and that of the original account. This is always an issue with any historical text, but the essential question for the following analysis is not the "truth" of the information or even whether it corresponds to the original *kipu* account but rather the degree to which any or all of the processes described above caused a dissipation of the structure or format that characterized the *kipu*-based discourse of the original record. I am not so much interested in the information itself as I am in the categories of information and their configuration or format within the discourse. Other than the

inga, sin saber dar otra razón, no conformando los unos con los otros. E vistose apurados en esta demanda, dixieron que todos los ingas pasados tuvieron sus "quipocamayos", así del origen y principio dellos, como de los tiempos y cosas acontecidas en tiempo de cada señor déllos; e dieron razón que con la venida del Challcochima e Quisquis, capitanes tiranos por Ataovallpa Inca que destruyeron la tierra, los cuales mataron todos los quipcamayos que pudieron haber a las manos y les quemaron los "quipos", diciendo que de nuevo habían de comenzar (nuevo mundo) de Ticcicápac Inga, que así le llamaban a Ataovallpa Inga, e dieron noticia (de) algunos que quedaron, los cuales andaban por los montes atemorizados por los tiranos pasados. Vaca de Castro envió por ellos, y le trujeron antél cuatro muy viejos.

Estos quipocamayos habían sido a manera de historiadores o contadores de la razón, y fueron muchos, y en todos ellos había conformidad en sus quipos y cuentas; no tenían otro ejercicio más de tener gran cuenta con sus quipos así del origen y principio de los ingas, como de cada uno en particular, desde el día que nascían cada uno, como de las demás cosas acontecidas en tiempo de cada señor déllos. (Collapiña and Supno [1542/1608] 1921, 3–5)

inherent distortions caused by the translation and transcription themselves, there is no indication that there would have been any specific ideological reason for modifying the basic *structure* of the Inca biographies that appear in the *Discurso*.

I am not merely taking for granted that the structure of the *Discurso* reflects in some way a corresponding *kipu* structure that may have survived in some form. Rather, this is the hypothesis that I will attempt to demonstrate. The starting point is the generally accepted assertion—even by Duviols and Porras Barrenechea—that the first part of this text was originally transcribed from *kipu* (Duviols 1979, 589; Porras Barrenechea [1952] 1986, 748; Urton 1990, 45). Absent the original *kipu* there is no way of examining the specific transcultural processes involved in the reading, transcription, translation, and editing of the 1542 inquest that informed the first section of the *Discurso*. But a comparison and contrast with the European tradition and other Andean texts such as Guaman Poma's *Nueva crónica* makes it evident that at least a residue of a distinctly Andean poetics survives the translation.

One of the main projects in the textual analysis of indigenous Andean chronicles such as Guaman Poma's *Nueva crónica* and, although to a much lesser extent, the *Discurso*, has been the identification and analysis of their European sources or influences (Adorno 1986; Cabos-Fontana 2000; López Grigera 2001; Pérez Cantó 1996; Plas 1996; Cummins 1994, 196). In many cases, the discussion of European sources is limited to textual models, because the content itself is of Andean origin. Often, the implicit assumption in the identification of European models for indigenous writings is that the authors of these texts took an indigenous content and expressed it using a European form. None would argue that there was no Andean form that structured the information prior to its transcription and translation into alphabetic Spanish, but the significance of this fact is routinely ignored. Andean reality, like that of the rest of the Americas, was certainly a world upon which the Spaniards imposed many forms; the cognitive-discursive paradigms that the Europeans had developed to perceive, describe, discuss, and argue about the world pre-determined the parameters within which the raw non-discursive material of the Americas would emerge (O'Gorman 1958). Yet European writers could not observe Inca history first-hand. They had to rely on native informants who employed indigenous discourses and had no other choice but to engage the paradigms presented to them through these discourses.

This is not to say that European discursive structures had no influence, but that European subjects were forced to negotiate—probably subconsciously in most cases—the terms of any representation derived from native sources. Every history of the Inca empire written during the colonial period has a distinctly biographical component that to a greater

or lesser extent structures the account (Julien 2000). The identification of these biographical texts with the European tradition claims to explicate the productive influence of the Spanish biographical genre (Adorno 1986, 40–47; Cummins 1994, 196). However, this is as much, or more, a “receptive transformation” in which the texts are perceived through a pre-established literary-cognitive paradigm as it is a recognition of any real adherence to familiar European genres.

This “receptive transformation” relates to what James Lockhart calls “double mistaken identity” in which relationships of similarity based on common denominators of sociocultural phenomena from two different cultures lead each to equate a foreign practice with its own; and what Martha James Hardman-de-Bautista identifies as the translation tradition:

[a] mutual, if unspoken, agreement from both sides, such that certain items in one language (both words and grammatical forms) were translated by specific items in the other, such that these agreed upon translations came to be believed to be the “true” and “only” correct translations. (Hardman-de-Bautista 1982, 153)

Here, however, we are not dealing with cultural concepts, discrete grammatical structures, or even individual words but rather extended discursive forms. The result is often not a direct substitution of one form for another (except perhaps in the reception of these texts), but rather an ad hoc, hybrid product with unique characteristics that were never assimilated or generalized over time into a distinct and stable written genre. European and highly acculturated writers such as Martín de Murúa and the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega¹⁰ assimilated and transformed Andean discourses to a greater degree than indigenous writers such as Guaman Poma or the translators of the history related by the *khipukamayusq* Collapiña, Supno, and others in the *Discurso*. Before analyzing these texts in detail, however, a critical understanding of the European biographical genre is necessary as a basis for comparison in order to reveal and avoid the pitfalls of the translation tradition.

HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY IN THE EUROPEAN TRADITION

Prior to the conquest of the Americas, Spanish historiographers were not producing general histories of the type exemplified by Alfonso el Sabio's *General historia* (13th c.) or the *Estoria de España* (13th c.) (Sánchez Alonso 1941). This may have been due to the popularity and availability of several versions of such histories in both Latin and Spanish, and to the reliance on these established textual authorities. Furthermore, in

10. For an analysis of the convergence of indigenous and European voices in Garcilaso's text, see Mazzotti (1996).

"Historiografía medieval: constantes evolutivas de un género," Fernando Gómez Redondo explains that in the second half of the fourteenth century at the end of the reign of Alfonso XI, two changes occurred in the thought or mentality of Spanish society: (1) a growing disinterest for the remote past of the nation as it had been reflected in the *Estoria de España* and its posterior derivatives; and (2) the life of the monarch acquires a great importance as the protagonist of history and as a sign of his time (Gómez Redondo 1989, 4). Gómez Redondo explains that these changes led to the conversion of the *crónica general* into the *crónica real*. Renaissance humanism inherits and adapts this emphasis on the individual, incorporating it into its historiographical methodology. Historians began focusing on major figures of Spanish society, presenting descriptions and biographies as *exempla* to be emulated or shunned.

During the age of discovery and conquest, however, writers were forced to deal with the fact that the older histories made no mention of the Americas. This embarrassing gap in the supposedly universal historical record induced a revival or rejuvenation of the *historia general* in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Yet the old models had been weakened, and the general flexibility and mixing of literary genres in the Renaissance affects historiography as well (Sánchez Alonso 1941, 355–463; Colie 1973). The humanistic biographical genre in particular provided a convenient structure for the seemingly fantastic exploits of conquistadors with often dominant personalities. The two most important works that set the standard for biographical histories and which might have influenced New World historiography are Fernán Pérez de Guzmán's *Generaciones y semblanzas* (1450) and Hernando del Pulgar's *Claros varones de Castilla* (1486) (Tate 1965, xxii–iii). Educated writers would have been familiar with the tradition of biographical histories, and indigenous and mestizo writers who were not as versed in European textual traditions may have become familiar with this format either indirectly through the chronicles written in the Andes, or directly through such works as Diego Rodríguez de Almela's *Valerio de las estorias escolásticas e de España* (1487), which seems to have been a popular work imported in the latter half of the sixteenth century (Adorno 1986, 43; Leonard 1942, 23).¹¹

In "Sobre la biografía española del siglo XV y los ideales de la vida," José Luis Romero explains that the Spanish biography exhibits three main structural features: (1) the lineage of the individual; (2) a physical and moral description; and (3) significant accomplishments (Romero 1945, 52–61). In the introduction to his edition of *Generaciones y semblanzas*,

11. Although the *Valerio* is biographical, it is structured thematically around such topics as justice, miracles, and various virtues and vices (Rodríguez de Almela [1487] 1994, 3–5) in which biographical anecdotes provide *exempla* for merely illustrative purposes.

Robert Brian Tate observes a slightly different, but still tripartite, set of elements that structure Pérez de Guzmán's biographies: (1) lineage of the subject; (2) a description of physical characteristics, temperament, and moral qualities; and finally (3) the date and place of death as well as the age of the deceased (Tate 1965, xvii). Tate explains that this formula is most obvious in the shorter biographies like that of Don Alfonso Enríquez:

Don Alfonso Enríquez, admiral of Castile, was the bastard son of don Fadrique, Master of Santiago, son of King Alfonso.

He was a man of medium height, white, red, thick in the body, not too bright, but discrete and prudent, very graceful in speech. He was quick to anger and often caught up in it; of great strength, friend of the honorable, and those who were of royal lineage but of lesser estate found favor and help from him. He had an honorable house, he set a good table, he understood more than he spoke.

He died in Guadalupe at the age of seventy-five years. (Pérez de Guzman [1450] 1965, 14–15)¹²

This biography does not contain the anecdotes/*exempla* that are so prevalent in the *Valerio*, but other biographies in the collection do include more extensive narratives. This bare-bones version reveals the humanist emphasis on the individual as the protagonist of history. In this case, the description of the subject itself serves as an example. The content of histories dedicated to kings has a more political character, but even so the focus remains on the ruler as an individual who is converted into a sign of the times (Gómez Redondo 1989, 4).

Table 1 represents a consolidation of the elements identified by Romero and Tate. This table outlines the discursive paradigm of the European biographical genre. Theories of genre, language, discourse, and cognition have exposed an inherent relationship between the elements of discursive structures and cognitive processes (Foucault 1972; Niles 1999, 12–13; Turner 1996).¹³ Writers who set out to compose a text can never be completely original: to one degree or another, they must imitate other

12. *Don Alfonso Enríquez, almirante de Castilla, fue fijo bastardo de don Fadrique, maestre de Santiago, fijo del rey don Alfonso.*

Fue onbre de mediana altura, blanco, roxo, espeso en el cuerppo, la razón breve e corta, pero discreta en atentada, asaz gracioso en su dizir. Turbávase muy a menudo con saña e era muy arrebatado con ella; de grande esfuerço, de buen acogimiento a los buenos, e los que eran linaje del rey e non tenían tanto estado, fallavan en él favor e ayuda. Tenía honrrada casa, ponía muy buena mesa, entendía más que dizía.

Murió en Guadalupe en edat de setenta e çinco años. (Pérez de Guzman [1450] 1965, 14–15)

13. We could even go back as far as René Descartes and Francis Bacon. In *Novum Organum* (1620), for example, Francis Bacon identifies four impediments to human understanding: idols of the tribe, of the cave, of the market-place, and of the theater (Bacon [1620] 1994, 53–68). These idols consist of preconceptions, habits, and dogmas invariably related to, and perpetuated by, language.

Table 1 *Discursive Paradigm of the European Biographical Genre*

1. Lineage
2. Physical and moral description
3. Significant accomplishments
4. Death

texts that they have read (Frye 1964, 40). And, in any case, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, originality was not understood as it is today. Adherence to the principle of *imitatio* was a conscious aspiration and the criterion for excellence.¹⁴ Thus, although the elements are general categories of information, the paradigm was a fairly rigid model that we may use to evaluate the relationship of Andean texts to this tradition.

HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY IN THE NUEVA CORÓNICA

Undeniably European discursive genres influenced Guaman Poma's *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno*. The overall form of the work is cast in the genre of an *historia general*. As explained above, the incorporation of a biographical mode within an *historia* is not remarkable, but it stands out here because the text does not synthesize the genres. Inca Garcilaso de la Vega's *Comentarios reales* (1609) also combines biography and the more general history,¹⁵ but this text, written about the same time and covering much of the same material as the *Nueva corónica*, weaves the individual life histories of the Inca emperors into a much broader account of Andean history and culture, a form more in tune with the historiographic conventions of the time. Evidently Guaman Poma's European education was not what it might have been. His limited exposure to the textual tradition of Europe—relative to Garcilaso—may have contributed to the “disorganization” and “unpolished” nature of the work. Many of these apparently unorthodox features, however, are consistent with Andean structures of meaning. The organization based on five world ages, for example, or the division of Andean society into ten age-graded census groups of men and ten of women reflect the structure of indigenous discourses (Brokaw 2002; Prada Ramírez 1995, 23; Rowe 1958; Ossio 1970, 1973; Wachtel 1973). At first glance Guaman Poma's Inca biographies also appear to derive from European models (Adorno 1986, 40–47), but closer analysis suggests that there is more at work here.

14. For a discussion of the principle of *imitatio* in Renaissance Humanism, see Streuver (1970, 144–154).

15. Garcilaso, however, begins with a brief discussion of the geographical status of the New World and then immediately focuses on Peru. He omits the traditional beginning based on the Biblical account in “Genesis.”

Any given genre or discursive formation is tied to an ideology. The emergence of a biographical historiography in Europe was linked on the one hand to a redistribution of emphasis between divine and secular authority (Gómez Redondo 1989; Sánchez Alonso 1941), and on the other to the humanist interest in the individual. The content and structure of these biographies were also influenced by other ideological systems such as aristocratic lineage and moral virtues. These ideologies and the force of the textual tradition influenced by them are precisely what has led critics to read the Inca biographies that appear in colonial chronicles as manifestations of the European biographical genre. However, the Andean ideology of dynastic descent associated with what is known as *capac* status more adequately accounts for the specific nature of these texts.

In *Reading Inca History* (2000), Catherine Julien explains that *capac* was a hereditary status with accompanying privileges and rights granted to the descendants of the first Inca, Manco Capac, through the male line (Julien 2000, 23–48). The Inca ruler himself possessed the highest degree of *capac* status, which legitimized his authority. But other individuals and groups also held different degrees of *capac* status that determined their rank in the Inca hierarchy. In this situation, political struggles often involved competing claims about complex genealogical relationships. Julien explains that formalizing an account of dynastic descent was a necessity in order to avoid false claims and confusion in the calculation of *capac* status. For this reason the memory of Manco Capac's descendants was strong "even after the argument that the Incas were powerful because they were *capac* no longer made any sense." (Julien 2000, 17)

In other words, the ideological weight of genealogically determined *capac* status as a source of political legitimacy permeated all levels of the Inca empire both before and after the conquest. The importance of *capac* status, then, was one of the major ideological determinants of Andean historiographic genres; the possibility of fraudulent genealogical claims would have been a major motivation for fixing these accounts in *kipu*.

Julien "excavates" numerous documents in an attempt to get at the underlying Andean genres that informed Spanish accounts of Inca history. She argues that colonial texts reveal two distinct but related genres that she labels the "genealogy" and the "life history." The genealogy was a series of short accounts that might include brief narratives, but was concerned primarily with dynastic origin and the establishment of the *panaca* of each Inca generation (Julien 2000, 89). The life history is also genealogical in nature, but it included much more extensive information, especially for later rulers (91). In spite of their differences, the ideology of *capac* status that informs both genres clearly differs from the ideology of European nobility evident in Spanish biographies.

The first Inca biography in Guaman Poma's *Nueva corónica* contains

introductory material not present in the other biographies. Perhaps not the best example for a comparison of features characteristic of the genre, it nevertheless reveals an important difference in genealogical conceptions. The following passages from the European text *Generaciones* and the *Nueva corónica* illustrate the differences:

Generaciones:

This King, Don Enrique the Third, was son of King Johan and Queen Leonor, daughter of King Pedro of Aragón, and descendant of the noble and very ancient and illustrious generation of Gothic Kings and especially of the glorious Catholic prince Ricaredo, King of the Goths of Spain. And according to the histories of Castille, the blood of the Kings of Castille and their succession from one King to the next has continued until today, which are more than eight hundred years without interruption by any other line. Which I believe will be found in few lines of Christian kings that last so long a time. [. . .]

And this King Enrique began to reign at a little over eleven years of age, and reigned sixteen, thus he lived more than twenty-seven years. (Pérez de Guzman [1450] 1965, 4–5)¹⁶

Nueva corónica:

From the first Inca Manco Capac, who reigned one hundred and sixty years with the beginning and with the last Topa Cuci Gualpa Huascar legitimate Inca, and of his bastard brother Atahualpa Inca and between the time the said Incas first started to reign and the end when their kingdom was ended and consumed, the said legitimate by law ruled one thousand five hundred and fifteen years by governing the land the said Incas and kings. (Guaman Poma [1615] 1987, 87[87])¹⁷

The biography of Enrique III begins by establishing his lineage following the formula identified by Tate and Romero. The nobility of Enrique III's line is derived from the illustrious reputation of his ancestors whose origins are located in the vague reference to the "generation of Gothic Kings." The longevity of the line is more a source of prestige than a legitimizing agent. To a large extent, legitimacy was taken for granted; it was honor and prestige that concerned Spanish biographers. At first

16. *Este rey don Enrique el tercero fue fijo del rey don Johan y de la reyna doña Leonor, fija del rey don Pedro de Aragón, e descendió de la noble e muy antigua e clara generación de los reyes godos e señaladamente del glorioso y católico príncipe Recaredo, rey de los godos en España. E segunt por las estorias de Castilla paresçe, la sangre de los reyes de Castilla e su sucesión de un rey en otro se ha continuado fasta oy, que son más de ochocientos años sin aver en ella mudamiento de otra liña nin generación. Lo qual creo que se fallará en pocas generaciones de los reyes christianos que tan luengo tienpo durase. [. . .]*

E este rey don Enrique començo a reinar de poco más de onze años, e reinó diez e seis, assí que bivió más de veinte e siete años. (Pérez de Guzman [1450] 1965, 4–5)

17. *Desde el primer Ynga Manco Capac que rreynó ciento sesenta años con el comienso y con el postrer Topa Cuci Gualpa Uascar Ynga lexítimo y de su ermano uastardo Atagualpa Ynga y desde que comensó a rreynar los dichos Yngas y acabar su rreyno, como se acabó y consumió su rreyno, los dichos lexítimos de derecho que rreynaron mil y quinientos y quinze años de señorear en la tierra estos dichos Yngas y rreys.* (Guaman Poma [1615] 1987, 87[87])

glance the passage from the *Nueva corónica* may seem similar to the biography in *Generaciones* in that it deals with the lineage of rulers descended from Manco Capac. However, the ideology that informs the continuity of Inca rule in this passage is neither honor nor prestige but rather legitimacy as established by genealogically determined *capac* status. Furthermore, although this passage from the *Nueva corónica* appears on the same page, it does not form part of Manco Capac's biography. This short section functions as an introduction to all of the biographies and relates to the empire rather than to the biographical structure. The biography proper of Manco Capac immediately follows this introductory segment, and it conforms to the same model as the rest of the Incas.

Julien asserts that Guaman Poma's biographies do not appear "to have reproduced Inca genres to any degree" (59), but she seems to base this argument on his genealogical information, which often differs from that of other chroniclers. The issue here, however, should not be whether or not the information is corroborated by other chronicles, but rather whether the information categories correspond to those of similar texts. Approached from this perspective, Guaman Poma's biographies should be classified under what Julien identifies as the genre of dynastic genealogy. I would argue that what Julien calls the genealogical genre might be better characterized as genealogical biography. The history is genealogical in the sense that the individual biographies do not appear in isolation. The genealogical link is important because it legitimizes each successive Inca by establishing that he possesses the highest degree of *capac* status, but it is only one of many essential elements that comprise this biographical structure. A thorough analysis of these individual biographies will help further illuminate their relationship to European and Andean traditions.

Although some variation is evident, the biographies of the Incas in the *Nueva corónica* exhibit a highly formulaic quality (Mróz 1984, 1989). Ten basic elements constitute Guaman Poma's biographical format: (1) a description of the ruler's clothing and arms; (2) physical appearance; (3) life works, achievements, conquests, or the way he influenced the empire by instituting traditions, conquering territories, and so on; (4) the name of the Inca's *coya* (queen); (5) the ruler's life-span and death; (6) legitimate children; (7) illegitimate children; (8) legacy or something memorable about the Inca; (9) the cumulative number of years ruled by the Incas up to that point; and (10) the successor to the Inca. All of these biographies appear on a single page following a drawing of the ruler. The shortest biography, dedicated to the fourth Inca Mayta Capac, illustrates the formula. I have labeled each of the different elements with sequential numbers in brackets:

[1] His weapons and helmet *uma chuco* were dark blue *yanas pacra* and his *masca paycha* and *conga cuchuna*, *ualcanca* and his cloak blood-red and his singlet blue

on top with three rows of *tocapu* and on the bottom boxes with white, green, and red, and four sandal cords. [2] And he was a very ugly man in his face, feet, hands, and body, thin, shivery, very afflicted. Nevertheless, valorous, melancholic. [3] In addition to his father's kingdom, he conquered up to Potosí and Charcas and many provinces and towns. [4] And he was married to Chinho Urma Mama Yachi. [5] And he died in Cuzco at the age of one hundred and twenty years [6] and he left riches to his idol Guana Cauri. [7] And he had children Chinho Ucllo Mama Caua, Apo Maytac Inca, Vilcac Inca, Uiza Topa Inca, Capac Yupanqui Inca, Curi Ucllo. [8] And he had other bastard sons *auquiconas* and bastard daughters *nustaconas* who were very many in number. And he had a daughter that he loved very much, and he called her Inquillay Coya. [9] Four Incas ruled five hundred sixty-five years. [10] Afterwards, his legitimate son Capac Yupanqui Inca succeeded him. (Guaman Poma [1615] 1987, 99[99])¹⁸

Table 2 lists the essential components of Guaman Poma's biographies and the order in which they appear. The first element in Guaman Poma's biographical format provides a description of the Inca's arms and clothing. I will discuss the significance of this item in more detail below. Here, it is important to note that no precedent in the European tradition exists for the inclusion of this type of information.

The second element in Guaman Poma's biographical structure is a description of the Inca's physical appearance and in a few cases, his character.¹⁹ This seems to coincide with the Spanish model (table 1, no. 2), but unlike the Spanish version, Guaman Poma's text does not link the physical qualities of the subject with his personality in a distinctly moralizing tone. The *Nueva corónica* describes Uira Cocha Inca, for example, as: "Handsome man, white of body and face, and he had a sparse beard,²⁰ and he had a good heart" [*Gentil hombre, blanco de cuerpo y rostro y tenía*

18. [1] *Tenía sus armas y zelada una chuco de azul oscuro yanás pacra y su masca paycha y conga cuchuna, ualcanca y su manta de encarnado y de su camexeta de hacía arriua azul y del medio tres betas de tocapo y de auajo caxane con blanco y uerde y colorado y quatro ataderos de los pies. [2] Y fue muy feo hombre de cara y pies y manos y cuerpo, delgadito, friolento, muy apretado. Con todo eso, brabícimo, melancólico. [3] Y conquistó demás que tenía su padre hasta Potocí y Charca y muchas prouincias y pueblos. [4] Y fue cazado con Chinho Urma Mama Yachi. [5] Y murió en el Cuzco de edad de ciento y ueynete años [6] y dejó rriquesas a su ydolo Guana Cauri. [7] Y tubo hijos ynfantes Chinho Ucllo Mama Caua, Apo Maytac Ynga, Vilcac Ynga, Uiza Topa Ynga, Capac Yupanqui Ynga, Curi Ucllo. [8] Y tubo otros hijos bastardos auquiconas y hijas bastardas nustaconas que fueron muy muchos. Y tenía una hija que le quería muy mucho, y acá le llamó Ynquillay Coya. [9] Reynaron quatro Yngas quinientos y sesenta y cinco años. [10] Después susedió su hijo lexítimo Capac Yupanqui Ynga. (Guaman Poma [1615] 1987, 99[99])*

19. All of the Inca biographies include a brief physical description except for that of Manco Capac, the first Inca.

20. The expression *pocas barbas* could refer to someone with little knowledge and experience (*Diccionario de autoridades*), but the context of this passage seems to suggest a literal meaning. And the accompanying drawing of this Inca in Guaman Poma's text depicts him with stubble on his chin (Guaman Poma [1615] 1987, 106[106]).

Table 2 Narrative Outline of Guaman Poma's Biographies

-
1. Distinctive dress of the Inca
 2. Physical appearance and character
 3. Life works; achievements; conquests
 4. *Coya* (queen)
 5. Life span; death
 6. Legacy or memory
 7. Legitimate children
 8. Illegitimate children
 9. Cumulative time of Inca rule
 10. Successor to the Inca

unas pocas barbas y tenía buen corazón] (Guaman Poma [1615] 1987, 107[107]). No real discussion of temperament takes place, and the moralizing tone is absent as well. The text does often include damning or redeeming qualities such as Inca Roca's confiscation of the property of the poor, or Yaur Uacac Inca's favorable disposition toward the poor, but it does so without the explicit moral overtones. This and the brevity of the accounts limit the exemplary value that the biographies might have had. Although these biographies certainly portray the Inca as a sign of his time, they do so in a way much different from the European model.

The remaining categories of information in the discursive formation derived from Guaman Poma's biographies might seem to fall within the expectations of the European biographical paradigm, but only if the second element, "significant accomplishments," is understood in the very broadest of terms. The inclusion of "illegitimate" children, for example, is not characteristic of the European genre; nor is the subject's spouse a standard component. The Andean model is a highly structured sequence of very specific informational categories. A comparison of tables 1 and 2 reveals significant differences.

The contrast, then, between the discourse of European biographies and that employed in the *Nueva crónica* reveals the divergent nature of these texts: they are informed by different ideologies; they convey different types of information; the components that they have in common often function differently; and the moralizing tone of the Spanish genre is absent in the Andean version. Although this does not, in and of itself, establish a *kipu* origin for the text, the high degree of consistency in format throughout the biographies is not consistent with the generally more variable nature of strictly oral genres. The rigidity of the model implies the possible influence of some kind of material medium that functions in a way similar to writing. The implication here is not only that the *Nueva crónica* biographies represent a unique Andean genre, but also that this genre was determined in many ways by the semiotic conventions of the *kipu*. Although Guaman Poma is not specific about

the information he took from *kipu* sources, his biographies are very similar to those found in the *Discurso*, which clearly identifies its own origin in *kipu*.

HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY IN THE *DISCURSO*

Like Guaman Poma's record, the *Discurso* presents the history of the Inca empire by sketching the biographies of each individual ruler. These biographies exhibit a highly formulaic structure that is consistent throughout. The sections dedicated to Lloque Yupanqui and Mayta Capac illustrate the biographical format of the *Discurso*:

Cinchiroca was succeeded by his son Lluque Yupangue Inga. He did not increase the kingdom because during his reign there were many rebellions by those whom he had inherited, and he was at the point of losing the kingdom; he did everything he could to maintain that which he had inherited from his fathers. And his woman was Mama Caba. With her he had three sons: the oldest was Mayta Capac; the second was Apo Conde Mayta; the third Apo Taca. From these younger sons descended those from the Chigua Yuin ayllu. He ruled more than fifty years.

Lluqui Yupangui Inga was succeeded by Mayta Capac Inga, who did not increase the kingdom in any way, because he was always at war with his own subjects, who were rising up in rebellion every day. And his woman was Mama Taoca Ray; and with her he had two male children: the older and his successor was called Capac Yupangui Inga, the younger Apo Tarco Guaman. From this younger son descended those of the ayllu Uscamaitas. He reigned fifty years. (Collapiña and Supno [1542/1608] 1921, 13)²¹

These two biographies follow a format that characterizes the presentation of all twelve Inca rulers: (1) the Inca is presented as the successor to his father; (2) military conquests and the area that he governed; (3) the Inca's spouse; (4) the oldest male child; (5) the younger children and the *ayllu* of their descendants; and (6) the number of years during which the Inca reigned. The history of each Inca is not limited to this information, but these elements are the essential common denominators that appear in every section and, with very few exceptions, in the same order. Table 3 represents the structure of the *Discurso's* biographical format.

21. A Cinchiroca subcedió su hijo Lluque Yupangue Inga. Este no aumentó porque en su tiempo tuvo muchas rebuliones de los que había heredado, e tuvo el Señorío en puntos de perder; harto hizo en sustentar lo que de sus padres había heredado. E tuvo por mujer a Mama Caba. Tuvo en ella tres hijos: el mayorazgo fué Mayta Cápac Inga; el segundo fué Apo Conde Mayta; el tercero Apo Taca. Destos menores descenden los del ayllu Chigua Yuin. Reinó más tiempo de cincuenta años.

A Lluqui Yupangui Inga subcedió Mayta Capac Inga, el cual no aumentó cosa alguna, porque siempre tuvo guerra con los suyos, que cada día se le alzaban. E tuvo por mujer a Mama Taoca Ray; e tuvo en ella dos hijos varones: el mayor y subcesor se llamó Cápac Yupangui Inga, el menor Apo Tarco Guaman. Deste menor descenden los del ayllu Uscamaitas. Este reinó cincuenta años. (Collapiña and Supno [1542/1608] 1921, 13)

Table 3 *Format of the Discurso*

1. Names ruler as successor to previous emperor
2. Conquests, achievements
3. Woman (*coya*, queen)
4. Oldest male child
5. Younger children and the *ayllu* of their descendants
6. Length of rule

Although a European reading of the *Discurso* may identify it with the Spanish biographical tradition, the same incongruities with that tradition exhibited by Guaman Poma's work appear here as well. As in the *Nueva corónica*, for example, the moralizing tone characteristic of European texts such as *Generaciones y semblanzas* is conspicuously absent from the *Discurso*, and the same structural disparities are evident. However, like the *Nueva corónica*, the biographical model employed in the *Discurso* exhibits a high degree of stability that suggests an established textual tradition. It is not unreasonable to conclude, therefore, that this work derives these features from the conventions of the *khipu*, especially since the text identifies itself as a *khipu* transcription.

This conclusion gains support not only from the *Discurso's* lack of compliance with the European model and its formal stability, but also from its close correlation to Guaman Poma's format. Table 4 provides a comparison and contrast between the biographical structures derived from European biographies and the format derived from the two Andean texts discussed here. A few similarities between the purely European paradigm and the format of the *Nueva corónica* and the *Discurso* are evident, but they are fairly weak. The differences far outweigh them. The similarities between the two Andean texts, on the other hand, suggest a generic relationship. The *Nueva corónica* and the *Discurso* differ, but a degree of variance is to be expected in any given generic tradition. The processes of transpositioning and translation that mediate these works would only exacerbate the differences.

The *Nueva corónica*, for example, ends each biography by naming the successor to the Inca, who will then appear in the following biography. The *Discurso*, on the other hand, places this element at the beginning of each biography. Although the *Discurso* may seem to parallel the Spanish format, which begins by establishing the lineage of the subject, the function of these elements clearly differs from one to the other. In the Spanish tradition, lineage functions in many respects as a measure of individual worth. In the *Discurso*, on the other hand, just as in the *Nueva corónica*, the statement of succession is a device that establishes political continuity, confirms *capac* status, and functions as a discursive transi-

Table 4

European biography	Nueva corónica	Discurso
1. Lineage		1. Successor of previous Inca
2. Physical and moral description	1. Dress of the Inca 2. Physical appearance	
3. Significant accomplishments	3. Life works/conquests	2. Conquests/achievements
4. Death	4. <i>Coya</i> [queen] 5. Life span; death 6. Legacy or memory 7. Legitimate children 8. Illegitimate children 9. Cumulative Inca rule 10. Successor to the Inca	3. Woman [<i>coya</i> , queen] 4. Oldest male child 5. Younger children & <i>ayllu</i> 6. Length of rule [see #1]

tion between the end of one biography and the beginning of another—often with no reference to any family relationship, which is already established in element number 7 of the previous Inca’s biography.

Furthermore, the position of this transitional element at the beginning of the biography in the *Discurso* may be misleading. In most cases, the phrase that constitutes this component is a short, independent statement: “Cinchiroca was succeeded by his son Lluque Yupangue Inga” [*A Cinchiroca subcedió su hijo Lluque Yupangue Inga*] (13); “Mayta Capac was succeeded by his son Capac Yupangui” [*A Mayta Cápac Inga subcedió Cápac Yupangui su hijo*] (13); “Capac Yupangue was succeeded by Inga Roca” [*A Cápac Yupangue subcedió Inga Roca*] (14). Some of the biographies link the transitional phrase to the following biography: “Lluqui Yupangui Inga was succeeded by Mayta Capac Inga, who did not increase the kingdom in any way” [*A Lluqui Yupangui Inga subcedio Mayta Cápac Inga, el cual no aumentó cosa alguna*] (13). This conjunction though might have been the work of the transcriber/translator. Horacio Urteaga’s modern edition of the *Discurso* places these statements at the beginning of the biographies, and indicates the division through the use of paragraphs, but in the original discourse the statements of succession may have belonged conceptually to the preceding biography. This would be consistent with Guaman Poma’s format in which the successor is named after reporting the cumulative years of Inca rule at the end of each biography: “Four Incas ruled five hundred sixty-five years. Afterwards, his legitimate son Capac Yupanqui Inca succeeded him” [*Reynaron quatro Yngas quinientos y sesenta y cinco años; después susedió su hijo lexítimo Capac Yupanqui Ynga*] (92); “Five Incas ruled seven hundred and five years and Ynga Roca began his reign” [*Reynó cinco Yngas setecientos y*

cinco años y sucidió Ynga Roca] (94). Further corroboration for this argument is found in the captions to the Gilcrease Inca portraits, which also follow this pattern, naming the Inca's successor at the end of each text (Barnes 1998, 238–42).

The biggest difference between the two paradigms is the difference in the number of information categories. The *Discurso* biography seems to be a somewhat abbreviated version of the Andean biographical genre that appears in the *Nueva corónica*. Several possible explanations may account for this disparity. The *kipu* source of the *Discurso* may have contained more categories of information that were left out of the reading, the transcription, or the translation. The official inquiries that motivated the transcription of this information were normally based on a set of questions sent from Spain. The *kipukamayuqs*, Collapiña, Supno, and the two others, may have performed an abbreviated reading in response to the specific information requested by the Spanish. It is equally as plausible that the Spaniards who were transcribing and translating the *kipu* readings (Vega 1974, 14–15) would have edited out any information that deviated too far from what they felt was relevant.

A few items in each of the models, although very similar, differ slightly. Items seven and eight of the *Nueva corónica* paradigm differ from the corresponding items four and five of the *Discurso*, but there is a kind of equivalence in that both make a distinction between two groups of siblings. The ninth position in the *Nueva corónica* refers to the cumulative years of Inca rule, while the corresponding sixth element in the *Discurso* only mentions the length of the reign of an individual Inca. Here again, this may be the result of Spanish editing or regional variations of *kipu* conventions. The *kipukamayuqs* who produced the *Discurso* were from Pacariqtambo (Cuzco), and Guaman Poma was from Lucanas (Ayacucho).

The differences may also stem from different reading practices or preferences. The information stored on a *kipu* is not displayed in a linear fashion. The *kipukamayuq* was presented with various dimensions of information organized according to a set of conventions that allowed numerous reading options. The difference between the *Nueva corónica*'s cumulative years of Inca rule and the *Discurso*'s reign of an individual Inca ruler, for example, may simply reflect the result of a calculation made by Guaman Poma or a desire to emphasize one detail instead of another. I would argue that the items of information provided in the two texts are similar enough to consider them general manifestations of the same generic categories.

One possible explanation for the similarity between these two works is that Guaman Poma was familiar with the text of the *Discurso* and used it as a source in writing the *Nueva corónica*. If this were the case, one would expect not only the format but also the specific information

in the biographies to be the same or very similar. Similarity here is relative, because most of the major figures of Inca history would inevitably be the same in all accounts. To complicate matters, even if Guaman Poma did rely upon a version of the *Discurso*, he might have modified some of the information to suit his own political interests. Although the structure of informational categories is almost identical in these two texts, significant differences in the information itself arise. However, these differences have no apparent ideological significance for either Melchor Carlos Inca or Guaman Poma. A comparison between the versions of Mayta Capac's biography in each text illustrates the difference.

Nueva corónica:

[. . .] *In addition to his father's kingdom, he conquered up to Potosí and Charcas and many provinces and towns. And he was married to Chinho Urma Mama Yachi. And he died in Cuzco at the age of one hundred and twenty years and he left riches to his idol Guana Cauri. And he had children Chinho Ucllo Mama Caua, Apo Maytac Inca, Vilcac Inca, Uiza Topa Inca, Capac Yupanqui Inca, Curi Ucllo. And he had other bastard sons auquiconas and bastard daughters nustaconas who were very many in number. And he had a daughter that he loved very much, and he called her Inquillay Coya. Four Incas ruled five hundred sixty-five years. Afterwards, his legitimate son Capac Yupanqui Inca succeeded him. (Guaman Poma [1615] 1987, 99[99]; my emphasis)²²*

Discurso:

Lluqui Yupangui Inga was succeeded by Mayta Capac Inga, who *did not increase the kingdom* in any way, because he was always at war with his own subjects, who were rising up in rebellion every day. And his woman was *Mama Taoca Ray*; and with her he had two male children: the older and his successor was called Capac Yupangui Inga, the younger *Apo Tarco Guaman*. From this younger son descended those of the ayllu Uscamaitas. He reigned fifty years. (Collapiña and Supno [1542/1608] 1921, 13; my emphasis)

Thus, neither the *Nueva corónica* nor the *Discurso* conforms to the European biographical genre, but they both independently exhibit the same, highly stable discursive format. This evidence lends support to their own claims of *khipu* origins. The structural stability both within and between these texts suggests a link to some form of secondary material medium as opposed to a strictly oral transmission. If we accept that the provenience of the biographies in the *Discurso* can ultimately be traced

22. *Y conquistó demás que tenía su padre hasta Potocí y Charca y muchas prouincias y pueblos. Y fue cazado con Chinho Urma mama Yachi. Y murió en Cuzco de edad de ciento y ueynete años y dejó rriquiesas a su Guana Cauri, Y tubo hijos ynfantes Chinho Ucllo Mama Caua, Apo Maytac Ynga, Vilcac Inca, Uiza Topa Ynga, Capac Yupanqui Ynga, Curi Ucllo. Y tubo otros hijos bastardos auquiconas y hijas bastardas nustaconas que fueron muy muchos. Y tenía una hija que le quería muy mucho, y ací le llamó Ynquillay Coya. Reynaron quatro Yngas quinientos y sesenta y cinco años. Después susedió su hijo lexítimo Capaca Yupanqui Ynga. (Guaman Poma [1615] 1987, 99[99])*

back to one or more *kipu*, then based on structural similarities the same is probably true of the *Nueva corónica* biographies. All of the above supports the assertions made in the texts themselves, and suggests that we should take such claims seriously.

KHIPU HISTORIOGRAPHY

In Julien's comprehensive survey of colonial chronicles, she argues that the genre of genealogical biography, of which the *Nueva corónica* and the *Discurso* are examples,²³ does "not appear to have relied to any great degree on *quipo* recording" (Julien 2000, 49). Rather, she maintains that there is a strong possibility that these accounts were recorded through paintings rendered on wooden tablets (56–59, 89). A pre-Hispanic pictographic tradition of Inca portraiture seems to have existed (Gisbert 1980, 117), which may or may not have been different from pictographic narratives described by chroniclers like Cristóbal de Molina and Bernabé Cobo (Molina [1576] 1988, 49–50; Cobo [1653] 1956, 59). Yet limiting a particular Andean genre to one medium may be misleading. The confusion arises in part because different chronicles that seem to incorporate the same Andean genre often explicitly identify different media sources, pictographic in one case and *kipu* in another. One solution to this problem is to simply disbelieve or attempt to discredit the provenience of one of the texts. I would argue that a more likely explanation is that the genre could be encoded in more than one medium. In the case of the *Nueva corónica* and the *Discurso*, however, the primary medium seems to have been *kipu*.

Although each of Guaman Poma's biographies is accompanied by a full-page drawing of the Inca to which it corresponds, it is very clear that these illustrations contain no narrative information. The only formal link between the illustrations and the corresponding text is the physical description that appears as the second element in the format outlined above. It seems likely that if Guaman Poma had relied on a pictographic narrative as the source for this portion of his work, he would have reproduced, at least in part, the narrative nature of the original drawings. These Inca drawings in the *Nueva corónica* may reflect a more iconic genre of Inca portraiture that Guaman Poma incorporated verbally into his primarily *kipu*-derived account. Eliminating in this way the physical description of the Incas from the strictly *kipu*-derived text brings the biographical format of the *Nueva corónica* even closer to that of the *Discurso*.

23. Julien's analysis is somewhat ambivalent about the *Nueva corónica*. She discusses it along with other genealogies, but with regard to both Martín de Murúa and Guaman Poma she states that "[n]either author appears to have reproduced Inca genres to any degree, although a memory of the painted tradition may have inspired their work" (Julien 2000, 59).

Even so, the *khipu* could have recorded visual information. Fernando Prada Ramírez suggests that the distinctive features of dress that characterized the various ethnic groups in the Inca empire were used to identify them in the *khipu* records kept by royal administrators (Prada Ramírez 1995, 28). The chronicler Pedro de Cieza de León explains that these administrators

went from town to town looking at the dress of the inhabitants and the resources they had and the size of the land or if they had livestock . . . Those who are sent to assess the provinces, entering into one, where they see by the *quipos* the inhabitants that there are. (Cieza [1553] 1985, 74)²⁴

Antonio Vázquez Espinoza states that these differences in dress existed prior to the Inca conquest and that they were allowed to persist in order to facilitate ethnic identification (Vázquez Espinoza [1630] 1992, 743), but Cieza de León seems to suggest that the Inca imposed a dress code on the populations that they conquered (Cieza [1553] 1985, 163, 166). The Inca may have imposed specific features of ethnic dress in order to facilitate *khipu* record keeping, and it would have been fairly easy to encode such information on a *khipu*.

The absence of such descriptions in other *khipu*-based chronicles such as the *Discurso* may be due to selective readings or translations. Given that the European paradigm did not include a description of clothing, many chroniclers would not have felt compelled to include such information in their accounts. It would have been natural for them to filter out what they saw as irrelevant. Indigenous chroniclers who might have understood the significance of these descriptions may have left them out because they knew they were irrelevant to the Spaniards, or the *khipu* upon which Guaman Poma relied might have been more elaborate variations of the genre.

In contrast to the *Nueva corónica*, the *Discurso* contains no physical descriptions or other indicators that it was linked to a pictographic text. On the contrary, it explicitly identifies its provenience in *khipu*. Julien disregards this claim in the *Discurso* in part because the origin myth of the Inca that precedes the series of biographies includes elements that only emerged in late sixteenth-century documents, which suggests that the text was not transmitted pristinely from the original *khipu* record (Julien 2000, 64). The scope of my argument does not include origin myths; rather it focuses exclusively on the Inca biographies themselves. In the *Discurso*, the origin myth does not form part of the biographical structure. Manco Capac is the main protagonist of the origin myth, but

24. *Iban de pueblo en pueblo mirando el traje de los naturales y posibilidad que tenían y la grosedad de la tierra o si en ellas había ganados . . . Visitando los que por los Incas son enviados las provincias, entrando en una, en donde ven por los quipos la gente que hay* (Cieza [1553] 1985, 74).

his biography, as defined by the format outlined in table 4, appears immediately following the origin story, followed by the biographies of the subsequent Incas. Furthermore, the fact that the original account was contaminated in some way does not negate the significance of the *kipu* as the original source in terms of the possible persistence of *structural* features tied to *kipu* conventions.

One of the most suggestive structural features of Guaman Poma's biographical format is that the number of components constitutes a complete decimal unit of ten. The decimal unit was—and still is—an important ordering principle in Andean society (Urton 1997), informing social organization and structures of meaning (Brokaw 2002; Julien 1988; Wachtel 1971, 127–30). I have argued elsewhere that this principle of decimal organization was intimately tied up with the conventions of *kipu* semiosis (Brokaw 2002). It would be tempting to argue that each of these categories corresponds to a string or a group of strings on a *kipu*. But, here, we must not prematurely attribute this organization to a manifestation of an authentic indigenous conceptual system based on a decimal structure. These categories are a provisional, ad hoc, heuristic device that I have devised to facilitate my analysis. In "Paracronología dinástica de los Incas según Guaman Poma," Marcin Mróz divides these same biographies into nine elements,²⁵ and other scholars will undoubtedly break them up in still different ways.²⁶ Furthermore, in the case of the *Discurso* biographies, it is impossible to arrive at a decimal structure. The point is that no matter how they are divided, a consistent, stable pattern emerges in which a specific number of components appear in each biography in the same order with a low degree of variance.

Although the ten categories I have identified in Guaman Poma's biographies may not reflect the Andean principle of decimal organization, other features do. In both the *Nueva crónica* and the *Discurso*, the biographies that vary the most from the format outlined in table 4 are the final two dedicated to the eleventh and twelfth Incas, Hayna Capac and Huascar. Gordon Brotherston argues that the first ten Incas represent "a decimal subset . . . whose reigns (unlike those of the last two . . .) exceed normal human life spans and esoterically link the world ages with modern history" (Brotherston 1992, 81[81]). This difference may be due to a standardization of *kipu* historiography precisely during the reign of the tenth Inca, Tupac Yupanqui. Although the *kipu* had existed

25. Mróz divides the biographies in the following way: (1) royal attributes, arms, and dress; (2) physical aspect and character; (3) relationship to gods, idols, *huacas*; (4) conquests; (5) corresponding *coya* (queen); (6) death, place, and age; (7) legitimate sons and daughters; (8) illegitimate children; and (9) aggregate number of years transpired (Mróz 1989, 25).

26. In my own initial analysis of this text, I identified seven categories of information in Guaman Poma's biographies (Brokaw 2001).

for hundreds of years before the Incas, the *Nueva corónica* explains that Tupac Yupanqui instituted the widespread use of the *kipu* in the Inca administration:

And he began to organize his estate, as well as communities and storehouses throughout the kingdom using accounts and *kipu*. . . . And he had assessors *yncap rantin rimac*; attorneys and protectors *runa yanapac*; secretaries *yncap quipocnin*; scribes *Tahuantinsuyo quipoc*; accountants *hucha quipoc*. (Guaman Poma [1615] 1987, 111[111])²⁷

This passage suggests that it was probably under Tupac Yupanqui's leadership that the *kipu* was adapted for historiographic use by the secretaries (*yncap quipocnin*) and scribes (*Tahuantinsuyo quipoc*). This would explain why the history of the Incas includes ten rulers precisely at that point. The importance of the decimal unit would have made a decimally structured historical paradigm highly desirable.²⁸ If Tupac Yupanqui were responsible for the institution of *kipu* historiography, the more consistent structure of the first ten biographies would make sense: these accounts would have been composed at the same time on *kipu* by the same *kipukamayuc* or group of *kipukamayucs*, while the biographies of the subsequent Incas would have been added later, perhaps by different *kipukamayucs*. In the interim, the *kipukamayucs* may have developed more advanced techniques of *kipu* semiosis, and the generic model itself might have changed slightly over time in response to the demands of the Inca. Furthermore, the last two Incas were the most recent, and first-hand experience with the physical personage of the Inca as well as the historical events were still present in the memories of the living inhabitants of Tawantinsuyu. The more recent accounts would be more prone to supplementation and/or elaboration based on the narrator's own experience or common knowledge.

Other variations or omissions that occur in the genealogical biographies may be due to the processes of transcription and translation of the original *kipu* texts, but they may also be the natural result of variables in the construction and reading of the *kipu* themselves. One of the least stable elements in Guaman Poma's biographies is the sixth category that I have labeled "legacy or memory." This item may come before the legitimate children (no. 1, Manco Capac; no. 2, Cinchi Roca; no. 8, Huira Cocha Inca; no. 9, Pachacuti Inca Yupanqui; and no. 10, Topa Inca Yupanqui), between the legitimate and the illegitimate children (no. 6,

27. *Y comensó hazer su hazienda y comunidad y depósitos con mucha horden, qüenta y quipo en todo el rreyno. . . . Y tubo azesor yncap rantin rimac; procurador y protetor runa yanapac; secretario yncap quipocnin; escribano Tauantinsuo quipoc; contador hucha quipoc* (Guaman Poma [1615] 1987, 111[111]).

28. For an analysis of the use of decimal organization in Guaman Poma's historical paradigm, see Brokaw (2002).

Inga Roca), after the illegitimate children (no. 4, Mayta Capac; and no. 5, Capac Yupanqui Ynga), or not at all (no. 3, Lloqui Yupanqui Ynga; and no. 7, Yauar Uacac Ynga). The absence of any given information category does not cause significant problems. The organization of cords and colors on actual *kipu* employ conventions that allow for the unambiguous omission of any given element within a sequence while maintaining the integrity of the pattern (M. Ascher 1983, 274; Ascher 1986, 270; Radicati 1979, 88–89).

The few variations in the position of biographical elements in the *Nueva coronica* as well as in the *Discurso* may relate to different modes of *kipu* reading. The *kipu* consisted of a horizontal main cord to which were tied vertical pendant cords. The pendant cords are divided into groupings indicated by such conventions as spacer-cords, color differentiation, and spatial separation. Each of the pendant cords may have its own configuration of subsidiary cords attached to it. These subsidiary cords, in turn, may have their own subsidiary cords, and so on. Knots may be tied into the cords at all levels. Thus, in reading the *kipu*, one might read horizontally or vertically (Mróz 1984, 87; Rowe 1985, 197). A horizontal reading moves from one pendant cord to the next, then returns to the subsidiary cords at the end of a pendant cord grouping if more detail is desired. A vertical reading would articulate the information on the pendant cord, then its subsidiaries before moving on to the next pendant. The complex three-dimensional nature of *kipu* texts made possible a variety of conventional reading styles or techniques for which there is no parallel in the linear system of alphabetic reading. These different reading techniques may even account for the differences between what Julien identifies as genealogical and life-history genres: an abbreviated, horizontal reading might correspond to the more precise, less elaborate genealogical biographies, and the vertical reading would then produce the longer, more detailed life-histories.

Admittedly, this analysis only focuses on two texts, but the format that structures these texts—or traces of it—is also evident in many other chronicles from the colonial period. The structural features of this distinctly Andean genre are evident to one degree or another in all versions of Inca history. Martín de Murúa actually explains that the history of the Inca empire recorded on *kipu* took a biographical form:

By these knots they counted the successions of the times and when each Inca ruled, the children he had, if he was good or bad, valiant or cowardly, with whom he was married, what lands he conquered, the buildings he constructed, the service and riches he received, how many years he lived, where he died, what he was fond of; in sum, everything that books teach and show us was got from there. (Murúa [1611] 1986, 373)²⁹

29. *Por estos ñudos contaban las sucesiones delos tiempos y quando reinó cada ynga, los hijos*

Murúa is not consciously attempting to analyze the poetics of *kipu* historiography, but he provides a list that follows very closely the structure of Guaman Poma's biographical paradigm presented in table 2.³⁰ This is not surprising given the close connection between the works of these two chroniclers (Mendizábal Losack 1963; Ballesteros Gaibrois 1978, 1981; Ossio 1998). The evidence suggests that Murúa and Guaman Poma may have relied on the same *kipukamayusq*s in the composition of their accounts.

Although Julien's comparison of numerous Andean chronicles focuses primarily on the relationship between texts based on the content of information categories, her discussion demonstrates that the categories themselves are fairly stable (Julien 2000). And the analysis of the individual texts of the biographies from the *Nueva corónica* and *Discurso* confirms that the sequential order of these information categories is consistent as well. This kind of stability is normally associated with discourses caught up in a dialogical relationship with some kind of secondary medium such as writing (Brokaw 2002, 287). This is precisely what one would expect from a discourse based on *kipu* conventions of seriation, cord configuration, color patterns, decimal organization, and so on that have been identified both in actual *kipu* (Ascher and Ascher 1969, 1971, 1978, 1981; Conklin 1982; Mackey 1990; Radicati 1965; Urton 1994, 2001) and in *kipu* transcriptions or *kipu*-derived texts (Murra 1981; Brokaw 2002).

The consistent ordering of information categories in the Andean genre of the genealogical biography may have functioned similarly to the structure of ethnocategories that characterize the format of the *kipu* analyzed by Murra (1981): a stable hierarchy of elements that determine the order in which information categories appear on *kipu*. Andean ethnocategories used in tribute records may actually have been a technique developed dialogically between the cultural conceptualization of the social and natural world on the one hand and the conventions of the *kipu* on the other. In the case of *kipu* historiography, the order of the biographical categories may have been more of a semiotic convention than a widespread cultural mode of thought, but this is the type of conventional adaptation that one would expect in the development of *kipu*

que tubo, si fué bueno o malo, valiente o cobarde, con quien fue casado, que tierras conquistó, los edificios que labró, el sirbicio y riqueza que tubo, quantos años biuió, donde murió, a qué fué aficionado; todo en fin lo que los libros nos enseñan y muestran se sacaba de allí y así (Murúa [1611] 1986, 373).

30. Guaman Poma also criticizes other chroniclers who "get it wrong." Speaking of Domingo de Santo Tomás, Guaman Poma complains: "And he did not write the genealogy of the first Indians, how, and in what way the *pacarimos* [natives] lived and multiplied or about their lives" [*Y no escriuió la descendencia de los primero yndios, cómo, de qué manera fue y multiplicó antiguamente de los primeros señores, rreys, pacarimos* [originario] *y de sus uidas*] (Guaman Poma [1615] 1987, 1079[1089]).

semiosis as it expanded to accommodate the needs of the Inca social and political machine. I would argue, therefore, that what we know about the capacity of the *kipu* and its use in storing historical information points to this medium as the stabilizing force behind the Andean genre of biographical history. What emerges from these records, then, is a distinct poetics of *kipu* historiography.

CONCLUSION

In the context of a cultural contact zone such as the colonial Andes, we must be extremely careful in identifying cultural products with particular traditions. I have argued here that the apparent conformance of the biographical format evident in the *Nueva corónica* and the *Discurso* to many features of the European biographical genre does not, in and of itself, indicate that they derive from the same tradition. The nature of the subject matter and the superficially universal aspects of many human life experiences such as birth, death, and sexual relationships make inevitable certain coincidences that will be reflected in the discursive modes developed in different cultures. In producing their texts, Guaman Poma and the *kipukamayuy* informants of the *Discurso* conceived of their projects according to the terms of the Andean culture that dominated their conceptions of the world and representations of it. The medium that gives us access to this information, however, was foreign to, and incompatible with, these indigenous Andean conceptions. Inevitably, both readers and writers in such a situation will attempt to establish points of contact between the two paradigms, an interface through which a compromise can be reached between the semiotic demands of one culture and the medium of another. In this case, the interface is the similarity between the biographical modes of Andean and European textual traditions. We cannot say, therefore, that the European biography did not influence the *Nueva corónica*, the *Discurso*, and similar Andean texts, for it may very well have done so. However, both of the textual traditions involved also influence the reading of the text. For modern readers, the European discursive modes are the most evident because the text is composed in Spanish, and without a cultural sensitivity to Andean textual conventions only the genre of European biography is perceptible. An understanding of the Andean textual tradition provides the necessary cognitive framework for at least the intellectual recognition of the under- and overlying dimensions derived from *kipu*.

The question remains about the nature of *kipu* semiosis, which is not the same as the debate about the *kipu* as writing. In anthropology, writing has been a benchmark used to measure the level or nature of human civilizations. Cultures have often been classified as those with (historic)

and those without (pre-historic) writing. This scheme creates an opposition between writing and orality that has no room for alternative forms of representation. Faced with an other mentality, an other “literacy” based on a technology that establishes a different relationship between medium and discourse, the European colonial episteme can only understand this other in terms of an already known, in-between category: mnemonics. Indeed, the most common analogue used to describe the *kipu* is the mnemonic rosary. An understanding of the *kipu* requires a deconstruction of this writing-(mnemonics)-orality opposition. Whether or not the *kipu* constitutes writing is not the issue I have pursued here. That is ultimately a semantic and, hence, political problem that may be solved by expanding—or not—the definition of writing. But there are several dimensions of the *kipu* that converge in such a way as to suggest that this medium of knotted, colored string is much more than a mnemonic device.

Undeniably the *kipu* employed a set of highly complex conventions capable of encoding semasiographic or even phonographic information (cord configuration, numeric quantities, extra-numeric knots, colors and color patterns, ethnocategories, etc.), and these features would only have developed in response to a semiotic desire or need. Abundant testimony from the colonial period claims that the *kipu* was a narrative encoding device and transcriptions of *kipu* historiography such as the *Discurso* and Guaman Poma’s *Nueva corónica* attest to the existence of highly stable genres of discourse. Furthermore, the structural features of this discourse exhibit a close correlation to known semiotic conventions of *kipu*.

The analysis presented above contributes to a general understanding of the relationship between *kipu*, the Andean genre of biographical history, and alphabetic texts that relied upon information derived from this medium. It is important to differentiate this type of analysis, however, from what Robert Ascher calls encipherment: a thought experiment that hypothesizes about how specific information was encoded in *kipu*; a kind of back formation that attempts to match up the structure of information with actual *kipu* conventions (R. Ascher 2002, 108–111).³¹ Although I have briefly mentioned general conventions that may be relevant in this area, the primary project here has been a comparative discourse analysis that identifies the nature of *kipu*-linked Andean genres as they have survived in colonial writings. The analysis suggests that the historiographic *kipu* stored information in a non-mnemonic way that when “read” produced a generic series of Inca biographies.

31. For another example of this encipherment methodology, see Pärssinen (1992, 31–50).

Although this type of comparative analysis is very productive, it is currently limited by the relatively small number of actual *kipu* transcriptions that have been discovered. Julien's work demonstrates that the structure of Andean discursive genres permeate the chronicles written in the colonial period (Julien 2000). Unfortunately, very few texts like the *Discurso* can be identified as originating—regardless of whatever discursive or ideological filters through which they may have passed—in a direct *kipu* transcription. There are surely many more relevant documents lying undiscovered in archives that will cast further light on the nature of *kipu* semiosis, and perhaps provide a firmer basis for Ascher's encipherment methodology. The first step is to recognize that the material medium of the *kipu* was linked to genres of Andean discourse, powerful discursive paradigms that do not simply dissolve and disappear when translated and transpositioned into Spanish.

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