The Lettered Mountain
A Peruvian Village’s Way with Writing
Andean peoples joined the world of alphabetic literacy nearly 500 years ago, yet the history of their literacy has remained hidden until now. In *The Lettered Mountain*, Frank Salomon and Mercedes Niño-Murcia expand notions of literacy and challenge stereotypes of Andean “orality” by analyzing the writings of mountain villagers from Inka times to the Internet era. Their historical ethnography is based on extensive research in the village of Tupicocha, in the central Peruvian province of Huarochirí. The region has a special place in the history of Latin American letters as the home of the unique early-seventeenth-century Quechua-language book explaining Peru’s ancient gods and priesthoods. Granted access to Tupicocha’s surprisingly rich internal archives, Salomon and Niño-Murcia found that legacy reflected in a distinctive version of lettered life developed prior to the arrival of state schools. In their detailed ethnography, writing emerges as a vital practice underlying specifically Andean sacred culture and self-governance. At the same time, the authors

**Praise**

“[A]s the first ethnography of local writing and archiving practices, *The Lettered Mountain* does a marvelous job of describing the centrality of literacy to Andean societies of past and present...With Salomon and Niño-Murcia’s important ethnography, ignoring Andean writing is no longer possible.” — S. Elizabeth Penry, *American Historical Review*

In *The Lettered Mountain*, Frank Salomon and Mercedes Niño-Murcia explore the evolution of alphabetic literacy in Andean villages, providing a valuable historical overview of this theme from Inka times to the present.... It is further evidence of the complex interplay between socio-political conditions and epistemology and how “Western” visions of modernity are now under siege the world over.” — Gavin O'Toole, *The Latin American Review of Books*

"*The Lettered Mountain* provides historians with a rich template for understanding how peasant archives are constructed in the Andes." — Alan Durston, *Journal of American History*

“Simply put, *The Lettered Mountain* is a beautifully written book and a must read for those interested in multiple...” — Judy Kalman, *Hispanic American Historical Review*

"*The Lettered Mountain* is destined to become a classic. Tracing the deep and rich history of writing and text production from the time of the Inka Empire to the present day, Frank Salomon and Mercedes Niño-Murcia have written a work that will transform our understanding of the nature, implications, and the consequences of literacy in communities that have, until now, been assumed to be outside the realm of the 'lettered.' It is a fascinating and..."
Frank Salomon is the John V. Murra Professor of Anthropology at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He is the author of *The Cord Keepers: Khipus and Cultural Life in a Peruvian Village*, also published by Duke University Press.

Mercedes Niño-Murcia is Chair of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese and Associate Director of the Division of World Languages, Literatures, and Cultures at the University of Iowa. She is a co-editor of *Bilingualism and Identity: Spanish at the Crossroads with Other Languages*.

Table of Contents

Illustrations xi

Tables xv

Preface xvii

Introduction. Peru and the Ethnography of Writing 1

1. An Andean Community Writes Itself 31

2. From Khipu to Narrative 71
Erotic Islands

Desi Land

Ordinary Affects
José Martí’s Our America

The Promise of Infrastructure

The Body Multiple
The Hundreds
Lauren Berlant & Kathleen Stewart

Designs for the Pluriverse
Arturo Escobar

Mohawk Interruptus
Audra Simpson
Andean peoples joined the world of alphabetic literacy nearly 500 years ago, starting with the Inca empire. The lettered mountain, a place of learning and knowledge, became a focal point for cultural and linguistic development. This transition from oral to written communication was a significant step in the history of the Andes, marking the beginning of a new era of documentation and record-keeping.

The Lettered Mountain book. Read reviews from world’s largest community for readers. Andean peoples joined the world of alphabetic literacy nearly 500 years ago, starting with the Inca empire. The lettered mountain, a place of learning and knowledge, became a focal point for cultural and linguistic development. This transition from oral to written communication was a significant step in the history of the Andes, marking the beginning of a new era of documentation and record-keeping.

Spaceship in the Desert

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS
905 W. Main St. Ste 18-B
Durham, NC 27701 USA

PHONE
(888) 651-0122

INTERNATIONAL
+1 (919) 688-5134

EMAIL
orders@dukeupress.edu

CAREERS
View Open Positions
Working at Duke University Press

© 2019 Duke University Press. All Rights Reserved.
Accessibility Legal Privacy
yet the history of their literacy has remained hidden until now. In *The Lettered Mountain*, Frank Salomon and Mercedes Niño-Murcia expand notions of literacy and challenge stereotypes of Andean “orality” by analyzing the writings of mountain villagers from Inka times to the Internet era. Their historical ethnography is based on extensive research in the village of Tupicocha, in the central Peruvian province of Huaro. The Lettered Mountain explores the “way with writing” of the people of Tupicocha, a village located about 100 km (a full day’s bus ride) east of Lima, in the storied highland province of Huarochirí. Its title is a homage to Ángel Rama’s hugely influential *The Lettered City*, which argued that hierarchical practices of alphabetic writing shaped the colonial origins of Latin American societies. A number of recent books have built on Rama’s emphasis on writing as a constitutive social practice while challenging his assumptions that it was restricted to Hispanic bastions (the lettered cities) and t