



Writing Without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica and the Andes

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The history of writing, or so the standard story goes, is an ascending process, evolving toward the alphabet and finally culminating in the "full writing" of recorded speech. *Writing without Words* challenges this orthodoxy, and with it widespread notions of literacy and dominant views of art and literature, history and geography. Asking how knowledge was encoded and preserved in Pre-Columbian and early colonial Mesoamerican cultures, the authors focus on systems of writing that did not strive to represent speech. Their work reveals the complicity of ideology in the history of literacy, and offers new insight into the history of writing.

The contributors--who include art historians, anthropologists, and literary theorists--examine the ways in which ancient Mesoamerican and Andean peoples conveyed meaning through hieroglyphic, pictorial, and coded systems, systems inseparable from the ideologies they were developed to serve. We see, then, how these systems changed with the European invasion, and how uniquely colonial writing systems came to embody the post-conquest American ideologies. The authors also explore the role of these early systems in religious discourse and their relation to later colonial writing.

Bringing the insights from Mesoamerica and the Andes to bear on a fundamental exchange among art history, literary theory, semiotics, and anthropology, the volume reveals the power contained in the medium of writing.

Contributors. Elizabeth Hill Boone, Tom Cummins, Stephen Houston, Mark B. King, Dana Leibsohn, Walter D. Mignolo, John Monaghan, John M. D. Pohl, Joanne Rappaport, Peter van der Loo

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