Gary Urton
New Views on Old Cords:
Accounting, Performance
and Power in the Inca Empire

Wednesday, April 27
5:00 p.m
Tisch Library, Room 316

The Inca quipus – the knotted-cord devices used for accounting and record keeping in the Inca Empire – have long been the subjects of intense interest and speculation on the part of archaeologists and historians. How was information recorded on the cords, knots and colors of these objects? Who made them? Who read them? And what was their role in state administration in what was the largest and arguably most complex state of the ancient Americas – the Inca Empire of South America? This talk looks at what we have learned about quipus from research over the past two decades and reflects on the role of quipu making and the reading, or performance, of the encoded information in the exercise of power in the Inca state.

Gary Urton is the Dumbarton Oaks Professor of Pre-Columbian Studies in the Department of Anthropology at Harvard University. He has worked in the Andes for nearly three decades and is the author of numerous books and articles. He is also the recipient of many grants and prizes including the prestigious MacArthur Fellowship.