

Knot News



International Guild of Knot Tyers
Pacific Americas Branch

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Joseph Schmidbauer-Editor

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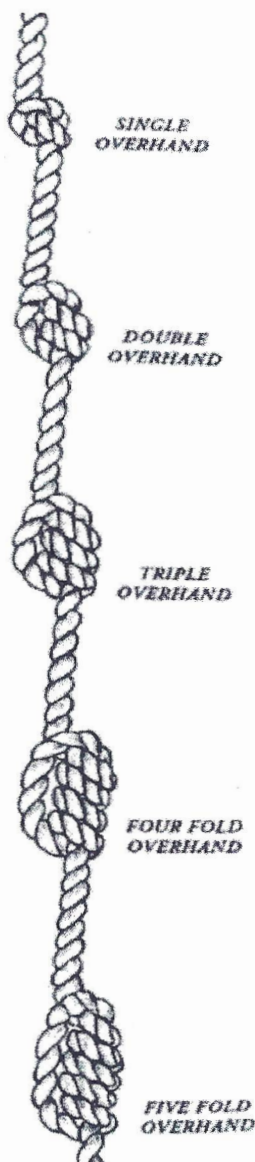
The Quipu

by Mike Storch



Ruling an empire as large as the United States East of the Rockies, the Inca of Peru¹ utilized a system of record keeping to better organize their vast holdings. As have other civilizations in the past, they settled on a system of numbers. By natural courses cordage became the medium, and knots the means. Natural fibers were spun into strings, joined, and knotted in a way to act as mnemonic devices. Such as the quipu (KEE-poo), and it was used to reckon census, tally flocks, give an accounting of raw materials, and otherwise keep a record of affairs of the realm.

A system of communications was established along the great routes from the capital of Cuzco. Runners (*Chasquis*) were stationed at posts (at intervals of five miles or less) along these routes to carry forward the dispatches of government. The dispatches, either verbal or accompanied by a quipu, are said to have been able to travel at a rate of one hundred fifty miles per day. Incidentally, in doing so, the quipu was transformed from the routine into the world of politics.



Quite a lot to ask of so simple a device as a knotted string, and as can be expected, there were limitations. Primarily, the quipu was static; it could record but not compute. (In contrast the abacus would be better suited to fluid computation.) There was even more serious limitations inherent in the quipu wherein knowledge of that being recorded was limited to the quipu maker. While the numerical values of any particular quipu can be deciphered, no significance can be attached to them. Extant quipus give no indication of the record they were intended to keep.

A horizontal cord was the foundation from which hung numerous vertical cords, much in the manner of a modern bookkeeper's columns of numbers. Knots were tied in the vertical cords at specified intervals. The knots were of the simple sort: overhand

and multi-overhand types. Further information could be imparted via the use of dyes. Various colored strings, on a single quipu could indicate different categories of things recorded, such as births, deaths, marriages, and other pertinent information for a given district. Importantly, the entire system was based on multiples of ten; it was a well defined decimal system.

A simple overhand knot represented the number one. A double overhand knot (with a surface appearance of two parallel lines) represented the number two. A triple overhand knot (with a surface appearance of three lines parallel) had the numerical value three; and so on through the number nine. Variations included the occasional use of 'figure of eight' knot for the number one and possibly a slip (loop) knot to indicate the end of a column. Additionally, the concept of zero was understood. While there was no specific knot to represent zero, the *absence* of a knot at a particular position signified zero for that position.

The first level of knots below the foundation cord represented the higher values (i.e. thousands). The next level below stood for hundreds; tens below that; units last. A triple overhand knot above, followed by a five-fold overhand knot, a blank space, then finally a double overhand knot, signified the number three thousand, five hundred, two. Given the possible combination of knots, colors, and the ability to make the quipu as large as necessary, it is not surprising how important a tool the quipu became for the Inca.

Perhaps the usefulness of the quipu did not end with utility. Considering the quipu was sometimes buried with its owner, the question arises whether deeper meaning may have been entailed on it. Higher civilizations do not normally choose insignificant trappings to furnish the final resting places of their notables.

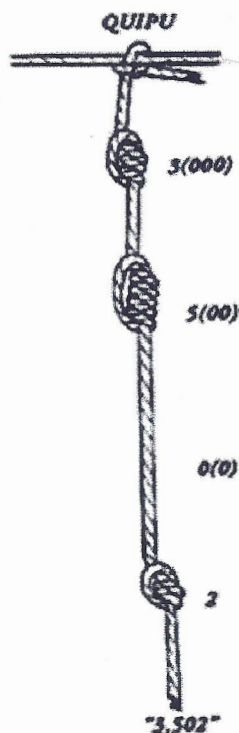
Other civilizations have used knotted cords as records. In ancient China, knot records are thought to have preceded the knowledge of writing. Unfortunately, the character of the fibers historically used in cordage tends toward disintegration. It is because of the peculiar climatic conditions of the west coast of Peru that

we have hundreds of preserved specimens of quipu to study². As more of the meaning of quipu becomes known perhaps, as through a lens into history, more of the true nature of Inca civilization will become apparent³.

¹Spanish intrusion into Incan civilization is dated AD 1532. Within a span of little more than a generation Spanish conquest was complete; and the Inca civilization effectively ceased to exist.

²Most intact specimens of quipu come from the desert region of Peru that stretches the length of the country, and penetrates from the Pacific Coast to the foothills of the Cordilleras. Their state of preservation can be attributed to the lack of precipitation and the dry, nitrous nature of the earth in which they lay.

³History is said to be written by the victors. (In any event, the Inca had no system of writing.) Moreover, extant writings of many of the Spanish conquerors of the time are in disagreement with each other. Questions remain.



Method of attaching pendant cord to foundation cord.

Ashley's Advice

"MANROPE KNOTS are often mistakenly called TURK'S HEADS. This is probably because certain sciolists have made the error in their magazine articles, which have had a wide circulation. There is no excuse for the mistake, as one is a solid MULTI-STRAND KNOT in the end of a rope, and the other is a SINGLE-STRAND CYLINDRICAL BINDING KNOT around the bight of a rope. All they have in common is a basket-weave surface.

In tying Multi-Strand Knots, do not allow yourself to become confused. Tie methodically, one move after another. Do not become impatient, for there is a lot to be learned. Not more than six ordinary seaman out of a hundred could even tie a MANROPE KNOT, and the MANROPE KNOT is about the easiest knot of the present chapter.

A plumber's apprentice labors for several years before he becomes a full fledged plumber. At the expiration of that time, if he has worked conscientiously and has talent, he is permitted to screw up pipes and apply solder and may even have advanced to the point where he rates a helper to carry his tools for him. Knotting is no simple craft, and there is a great variety."

The Ashley Book of Knots
Clifford W. Ashley

Movie Trivia Corner

Has anyone seen the movie *Jaws* recently? There are two scenes in this movie where knots play a major part.

Quint, the shark hunter, wants the oceanographer, Mat Hooper, to prove his skill in seamanship. What knot does he ask him to tie? For extra points, what comment does Hooper make about the knot he is about to tie?

Later in the movie, they have gone out to sea in search of the great white shark. What knot is Quint trying to teach to Police Chief Brody while they are waiting for the shark to hit their bait?

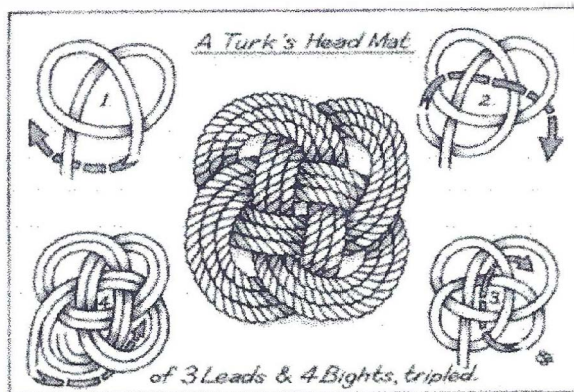
My thanks to Pieter van de Griend and his *Het Knoopje Knauwertje* for this one.

Helpful Hints

Terry Ridings from B.C. Canada writes:

"If anyone is looking for a good basic knife that is affordable take a look at Russell Knives, they are available at commercial fisherman's chandlers. Look for model number 2332 which has a 3 1/2" blade and a hardwood handle that retails for about 4 bucks. This in turn provides an interesting opportunity to make an attractive leather sheath. The other thing is if you are sharpening a knife that is only going to be used for ropework, sharpen it to much flatter angle (i.e. the number of degrees gets smaller), the edge is not as strong but it will cut better.

Still on the subject of tools - take a look at Sacking Needles. This is a diamond shaped needle that is bent. They come in two forms: the traditional where the bend is about midway along the diamond profile and some newer ones with the bend right at the end. A 6 inch traditional style is an almost perfect tool for working down fancy work in small cord. The curve sits nicely in your hand and the ridge of the diamond provides an edge to clamp the cord against your thumb, a twist to the wrist and the knot is tighter. On my needle I have a small lanyard approx. 2 1/2" long... yet another excuse to tie knots!"



Monthly Meeting at the Museum

13 January 1997

Members attending this month's meeting were: Darrell McNurlan, Lindsey Philpott, Mike Waring, Tim Howard, Joe Schmidbauer, Tom Gergen, Mark Sherman, Mike Bowman, Tom Mortell.

The Secretary called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM aboard the topsail schooner *Swift of Ipswich*.. The first order of business was to pass along Holiday Greetings sent to the Branch by Dick Blackmer if the IGKT-NAB and also Brian Field and Des & Liz Pawson of the IGKT England.

Mr. Charles Warner of Picton, Australia has offered his book *A Fresh Approach to Knotting and Ropework* for sale direct to our members. Joe would like to hear from anyone who is interested in obtaining a copy and to have the money to him no later than the February meeting. Here is the cost breakdown:

1 copy	= AUS\$17 -> US\$11.13
2 copies	= AUS\$32 -> US\$20.94
3 copies	= AUS\$46 -> US\$30.11
4 copies	= AUS\$59 -> US\$38.66
5 copies	= AUS\$72 -> US\$47.12

This is quite a deal for a very exceptional book and everyone is encouraged to participate. The author has donated a copy to our Branch library and it is available for your perusal.

Another good source of books is fellow Branch member Martin Combs. He has many titles not normally not east to obtain in the US by such authors as C.L. Spencer, P.P.O. Harrison, L. Popple and the Australian Ron Edwards. His address is:

Kodiak, AK 99615

E-mail: mlbcak@ptialaska.net

Two sources of hemp twine, cord and rope has come to the attention of the Branch. They are:

HEMPESTREE

Phone & Fax: (714) 484-9278

E-mail: hempetree@southland.net

Internet: www.southland.net/hempetree

OHIO HEMPERY

Phone: (740) 662-4367 1-800 BUY HEMP

E-mail: hemperry@hemperry.com

Internet: <http://hemperry.com>

Copies of the flyer and/or catalog are available upon request from the Secretary.

Darrell next reported that there will be a Whale Watch Festival at Dana Point Harbor. It will be held over three weekends in February. It was decided for the Branch to have a booth on the weekend of the 14th and 15th. Volunteers so far are Darrell, Lindsey, Joe, Tom Gergen, Tom Mortell and Mark. The Tall Ships Festival this past Spring was a great success for us and we can hope for the same kind of reception this time. It will depend on whether we get enough members involved to see if we stretch it over the other weekends. We will keep members posted of our plans as they develop.

Darrell also mentioned that the brig *Pilgrim* of the Orange County Marine Institute at Dana Point Harbor has a need for new crew members. You are welcome to come join in on any Saturday from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM. It costs \$10 to become a member.

Lindsey reported on the PAB web site which is up, running and looking very impressive. There are seven pages at our site. The Home Page; Knot Links; Membership Information; an abbreviated *Knot News*; Meetings & Events; a Rogues Gallery that displays members work and portraits; and finally Thou Shalt Knot which is a show and tell knot tying demonstration page. Lindsey asked for members to look the site over and he welcomes any comments or contributions. Everyone is welcome to come visit us at:

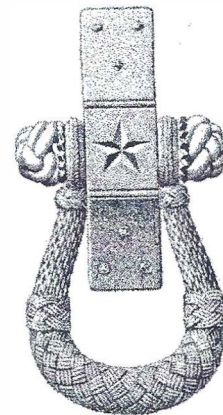
<http://home.millenia.com/~igktpab>

A discussion was started on what to do to start preparing for our Second Annual Meeting in June. It will be in the Brass Room of the LA Maritime Museum on Friday the 24th. The Show and Demonstration will follow on the 25th. Some ideas were tossed around on how best to draw people to the show. Then Lindsey came up with the suggestion of having Brion Toss as a guest speaker. As an incentive we would use Branch funds to pay for his flight down here from Washington. Brion's lecture on that Friday would be for Guild members only. The Show and Demonstration on the following Saturday would be open to the public. This will be just

the kind of draw we need to attract attention to us with the proper advertising. [Editor's Note: Since the meeting, Lindsey has contacted Brion and he has agreed to attend.]

At our last meeting Lindsey requested if the Branch make up some knot centerpieces for upcoming LAMI dinner. As it turns out, there is no place for centerpieces on the long, narrow tables used for the dinner. Instead it was suggested we make up some Turk's Head napkin rings instead. Lindsey donated some very nice 1/8 inch dacron which the members commenced to make into 3x5 Turk's Heads. By the end of the meeting we had some 60 odd bracelets (we need about 75), the rest will be completed and finished off at the next gathering.

The next monthly Meeting of the IGKT-PAB is scheduled for the 10th of February in the LA Maritime Museum in San Pedro.



Library and Archive

I have not mentioned for the last few issues of *Knot News*. the donations that have been pouring into our Branch Library and Archive. Let me bring everyone up to date:

Knots by Peter Owen. Hardback by Charwell Books, 1996.

Donated by Lindsey Philpott, 1997.

Rigging US Army Technical Manual FM5-125, October 1995.

Donated by Joe Schmidbauer, 1997.

A Fresh Approach to Knotting and Ropework by Charles Warner. Paperback by McPherson's Printing Group, 1992.

Donated by the author, 1997.

Knots Useful and Ornamental by Ron Edwards. Pamphlet by Ram Skull Press, 1997.

Donated by Martin Combs, 1998.

Martin Combs has also donated a copy of Spencer's *Knots, Splices and Fancy Work* to the local library in Kodiak, Alaska in the name of the Pacific Americas Branch. He suggests that other members do the same in their areas to help spread the word of our presence.

Extended Turk's Head 4x29 in white cotton cord wrapped around a #2 pencil. Made the same as a regular three strand Turk's head except 2 or 3 extra turns are taken at the start. After the piece was completed, it was changed to a 5 strand and then finished off.

Donated by Willard Salmons, 1997.

Mr. Salmons has also donated a box full of pencils covered with multi-colored Turk's Heads patterned on Ashley's #1289. These are for resale by the Branch as we wish.

Candy jar covered with square knotting and half hitch work in white cotton cord.

Donated by Darrell McNurlan, 1997.

Turtle - knotted in red and black silk cord.
Donated by Tony Dance, 1997.

Bell Pull - made with 1/8 inch white nylon cord. Four strand round sennit into eight strand round sennit. Green and blue Turk's Head at the top and a double Turk's Head in the middle. A multi-strand green and blue knob knot covers the end.

Donated by Pieter van de Griend; , Netherlands, 1998.

Knot Lore

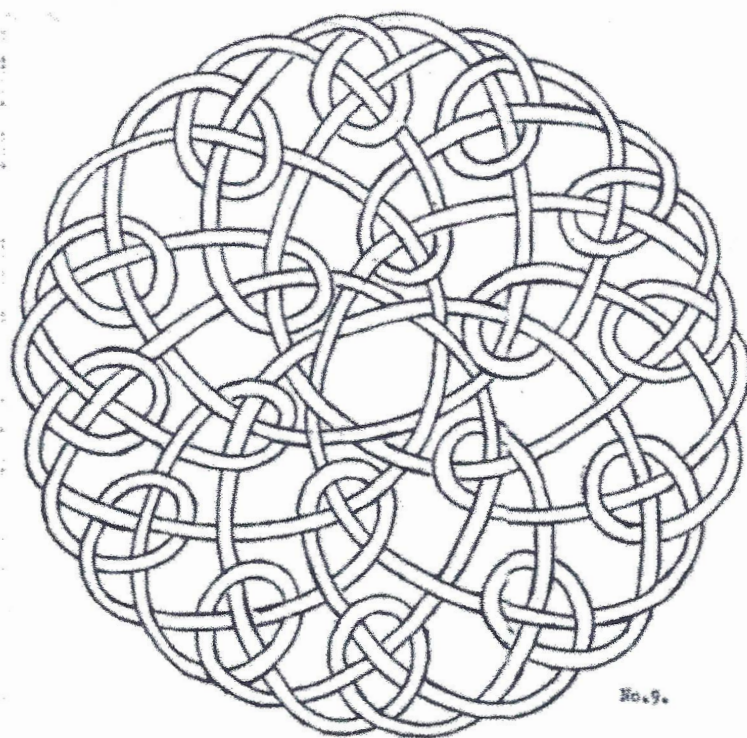
Knots were sometimes used as a form of sympathetic magic for preventing a woman in labor from giving birth. Therefore during childbirth all the knots around her clothing had to be untied, and her hair had to be unbound.

Since I had such a good response to the last knot word search, here is another for your amusement.

Z F T W O H A L F H I T C H E S S E T M G G N
F I H C T I H G N I L L O R I I R H A R K E M
Q S G S S S H E E P S H A N K A S I Z E C Y T
M H X N T Q O C C C A Z X U U N X G C D I H A
I E D Q I C L W D L T D Z Q A M H S L B R J U
L R A F M N N O F A Y T S M M C N H O R R Y T
L M C H A I N H I T C H R V T B S E V W A V L
E A P P T X I U D C D E D I M D U E E O C K I
R N L G P T N O R N H T H N G O R T H B E I N
S S M U C O H D A S H L W R E U G B I D L L E
T B C H O E H H I G L D J B T B E E T N B L H
E E Z M P Z R F I A L M F P I L O N C A U I I
V N P M P E I E W A H L Y O M E N D H H O C T
E D S W V S E K R H L X F O B O S G K R D K C
D P Y O C R C K B E O C R L E V B X D E N H H
O L V X U A S T F F S S I T R E O Z H V N I O
R O A G L H B O W L I N E A H R W I P O T T X
E J I B E L F T R M S P H I I H J D M M K C I
S F I A U C M F J D P S P R T A E E U E O H K
N Y D L G S R O L I A S N A C N P A D E C L N
N R A C A T S P A W C D Y L H D Z Y J H I C Q
T I L L E R S H I T C H M T G L P Z V A F N G

Find These Words

Blackwall Hitch
Bow
Bowline
Cat paw
Chain hitch
Clove hitch
Double Carrick
Double Overhand
Figure Eight
Fishermans
Fishermans Bend
Half Hitch
Killick Hitch
Lariat Loop
Larkshead
Millers
Overhand
Overhand Bow
Rolling Hitch
Running
Sailors
Sheepshank
Sheet bend
Square
Stevedores
Surgeons
Tautline Hitch
Tillers Hitch
Timber Hitch
Two Half Hitches



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