One of the most remarkable Incan technologies was the quipu—the system of knotted strings that was used to record information. Each quipu had a strong main string to which many secondary strings were attached. These secondary strings were knotted in certain ways, with some twisting in one direction and others in another. Adding to the complexity, secondary strings are of different colors, and some have additional strings attached to them.

Scholars have yet to unravel the secret of the quipu—the knotted strings that the Inca used for record keeping.
The quipus were tools for accounting, ways of keeping track of the number of animals in a flock or the number of people in a village. Some scholars believe the quipus may also have been used as a form of written language—to record, for instance, histories, but that is less certain. At the very least, we do know that expert individuals who made and read quipus used their patterns to remember key people, places, and events.

Quipus were carried by the chaski (CHAHS kee), the royal messengers who carried news and information along the roads. Young men were specially trained for this role. Each chaski ran as fast as he could for as long as he could. Fresh runners waited at stations along Inca roads. A runner who was too exhausted to travel farther and needed a replacement blew on a shell as he neared a station. A fresh runner emerged and began running alongside him. The first messenger relayed the message, the second runner raced on, and the first runner stopped to rest. The Inca system of message runners was efficient and fast. A relay of messengers could cover an impressive 150 miles (240 kilometers) in a day.

The chaski did not just carry messages. They were also used to transport light and valuable goods, especially those meant for the Sapa Inca. Sometimes chaski brought fresh fish from the coast to Cusco.