

University of Utah
Department of Anthropology
Introduction to Maya Hieroglyphic Writing
Course 4962/5962-009
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Overview

In this course students will learn the fundamentals about ancient Maya hieroglyphic writing. Students will learn about the basic structure of Maya writing and its relationship to Mayan languages, as well as the genres of texts represented by this script. The course will provide an introductory history of decipherment and both the correct and incorrect attempts to read the glyphs. Students will learn the fundamental of the Maya calendar

Textbooks

There are two required textbooks for this class:

Coe, Michael, and Mark Van Stone
2005 *Reading the Maya Glyphs*. Second edition. Thames & Hudson, New York, NY.
ISBN 978-0500285534

Stone, Andrea and Marc Zender
2011 *Reading Maya Art*. Thames & Hudson, New York.

Other readings will be made available for download from the course website.

Course Grade

The final grade for the course is composed of three parts:

- 1) Weekly Quizzes and Assignments, which are worth 30% of your final grade. There are 6 of these but only the 5 highest grades.
- 2) Final Exam (to be scheduled), worth 45%
- 3) Decipherment Project. This consists of the epigraphic analysis of a group of inscriptions and the production of a brief written report, as well as a class presentation, on the last day of class. This project is worth 25% (10% presentation, 15% for the paper).

Preliminary Class Schedule: 3 Credit hours

The Origins and Death of Maya Writing In today's class we learn about the origins and death of Maya writing:

Readings: TBA

The Maya Calendar: The Fundamentals

The Dawn of Decipherment

In this class we learn about the discovery by westerners of ancient Maya civilization and the first attempts at deciphering their ancient writing system.

Readings: TBA

The Era of Astronomy and the Calendar

In this class we examine the basics of the Maya calendar and how this first cracking of the Maya code led to most scholars believing that little more than calendrics and astronomy were contained within the Maya script.

Readings: Coe & Van Stone, *Reading the Maya Glyphs*, Chapter 3.

Knorosov and the Phonetic Approach

Today we examine breakthrough in decipherment by Yuri Knorosov, and learn about the phonetic approach to Maya hieroglyphs.

Readings:

Proskouriakoff and the Historic Approach.

This class discusses the historic approach of Tatiana Proskouriakoff, which revealed that the Maya hieroglyphs talked about the lives of ancient kings and queens, and not just the calendrics and astronomical calculations of priests.

Readings:

Practical Epigraphy 1: The Dynasty of Palenque

In this class we will practice what we have learned so far in the class by working with the inscriptions of Palenque

10 Phonetic Syllables. In this class we investigate the major breakthrough in the pace of decipherment in the mid-1980s, through the comparative method of David Stuart.

Readings:

Rituals and Religion. In today's class we will look at inscriptions that discuss the religious life of ancient Maya kings and queens.

Readings: Coe and Van Stone, *Reading the Maya Glyphs*, Chapters 4 and 11.

Warfare and Politics. Today we examine the political lives of Maya lords, including the battles they fought.

Readings: Coe and Van Stone, *Reading the Maya Glyphs*, Chapter 8.

Texts on Ceramics and Portable Objects. In this class we look at the large corpus of texts that appear on portable objects, especially polychrome ceramics.
Readings: Coe and Van Stone, *Reading the Maya Glyphs*, Chapter 10.

Final Exam Review. The first half of this class is set aside for student presentations, and the second half consists of a Final Exam Review.
No Readings.

Final Exam: TBA