

Book 1:

Writing in Maya Glyphs

Names, Places, & Simple Sentences

A Non-Technical Introduction to

MAYA GLYPHS



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in collaboration with Lynn Matson

The Aid and Education Project, Inc.

' El Proyecto de Ayuda y Educación '



This book is dedicated to the Maya people living today in Mesoamerica.

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Title Page Top: The Stingray Paddler (far left) and the Jaguar Paddler (far right) row the Maize God (center) and mythological beasts.

Title Page Bottom: The Canoe sinks, symbolizing the sinking of the Milky Way as the night progresses.



Writing in Maya Glyphs

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A Non-Technical Introduction

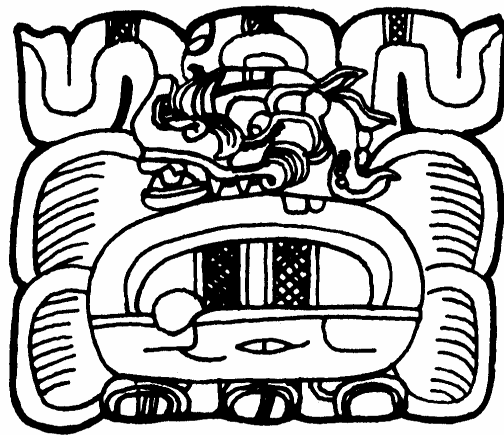


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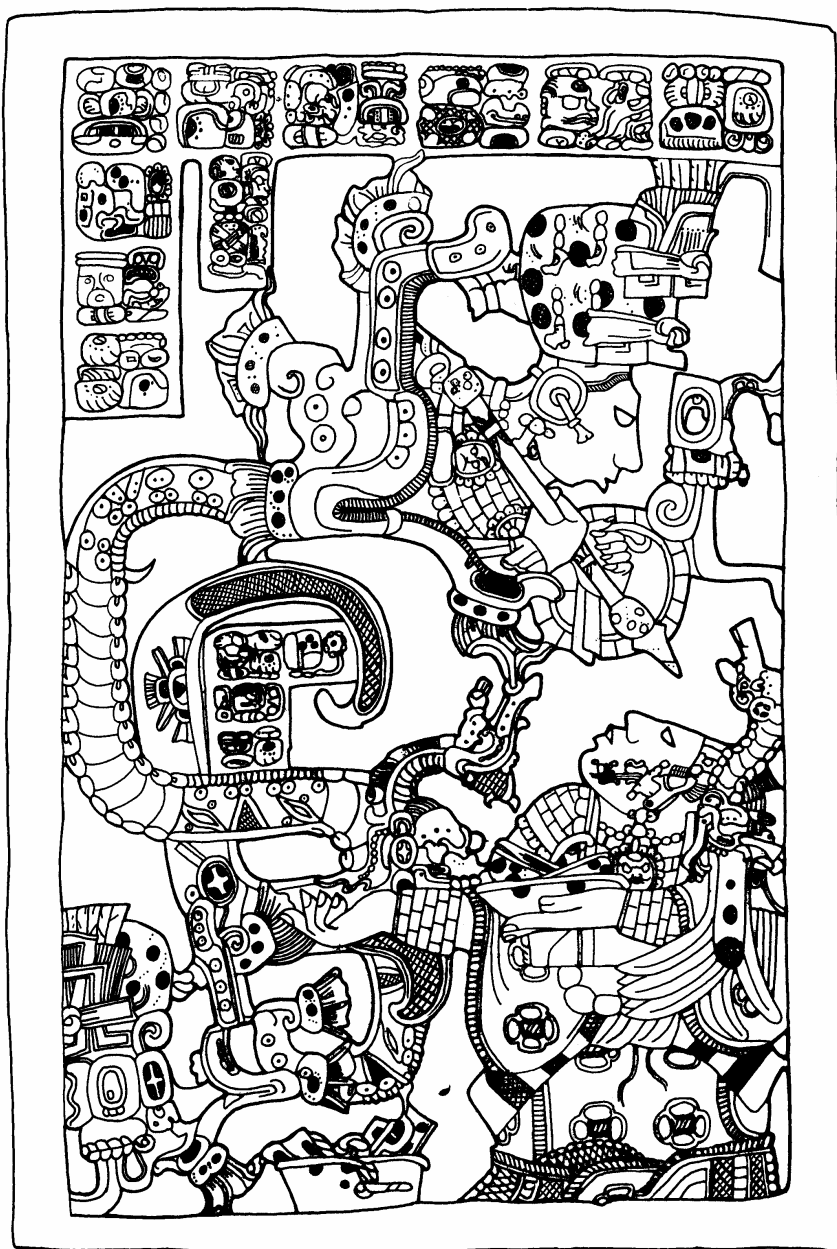
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Chapter 1

Introduction:

The Ancient Maya & Their Writing



Lady Xook has a vision of an ancestor, October, 681

History

You are about to begin to study one of the world's most beautiful forms of writing, the hieroglyph writing of the ancient Maya. At the same time you will learn about one of the world's most remarkable civilizations.

In the history of the world, there have been few people like the ancient Maya. The Maya were great architects, mathematicians, astronomers, and artists. In their time, they built cities as grand and beautiful as any in Europe or the Far East. They were one of only a few people who invented the zero, a concept extremely important in mathematics. According to some calculations, their measurement of the length of the year was more accurate than that of the Europeans when they arrived in the New World. And their artists created a style that is considered one of the great art forms of history, and is today studied by artists throughout the world.

What's more, they were one of only three civilizations that invented a complete system of writing. In this booklet, you will learn about ancient Maya writing and about the ancient Maya civilization.

For many years the ancient Maya were a mystery to the world. Their writing could not be read by anyone, not even modern Maya people. Now, in just the last 25 years, the 'Maya

Code' has been largely broken and it is possible to understand much of what was written on monuments, stelae, tablets, vases, and other objects made by the ancient Maya.

Modern Mayan languages, spoken today in México and Guatemala, share roots with the language of the ancient Maya. And Chorti, the modern Maya language of eastern Guatemala, is the direct descendant of the language of the ancient Maya. In fact, much of what is now known about the ancient Maya language has been gleaned from modern Maya languages, especially *Yucatec*, spoken in the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico, and Chorti (written more correctly as *Ch'orti'*).

Maya glyphs and the ancient Maya language were used in all the cities of the ancient Maya world, including the famous cities of Palenque, Uxmal, Chichen Itza, Quiriquá, Copán and Tikal. While these great cities flourished, Europe languished in the Dark Ages.





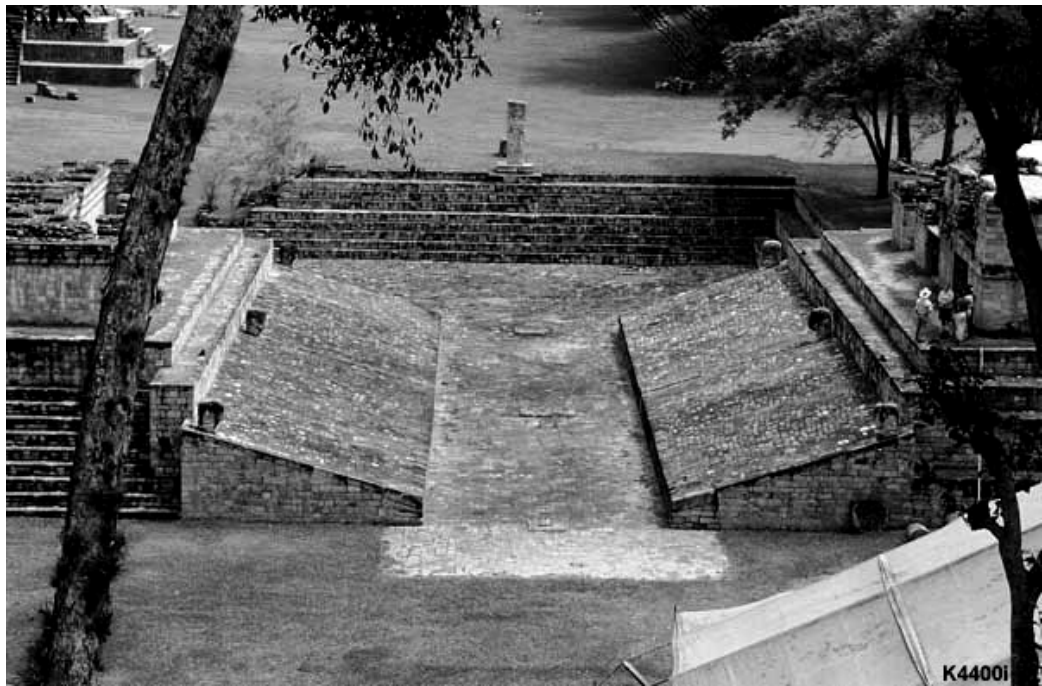
The Pyramid of the Magician at Uxmal, México.

Below, the Palace at Palenque, Mexico.





The Main Plaza at Tikal, Guatemala.



The Beautiful Ball Court at Copán, Honduras



A giant stela at Quiriguá in Guatemala



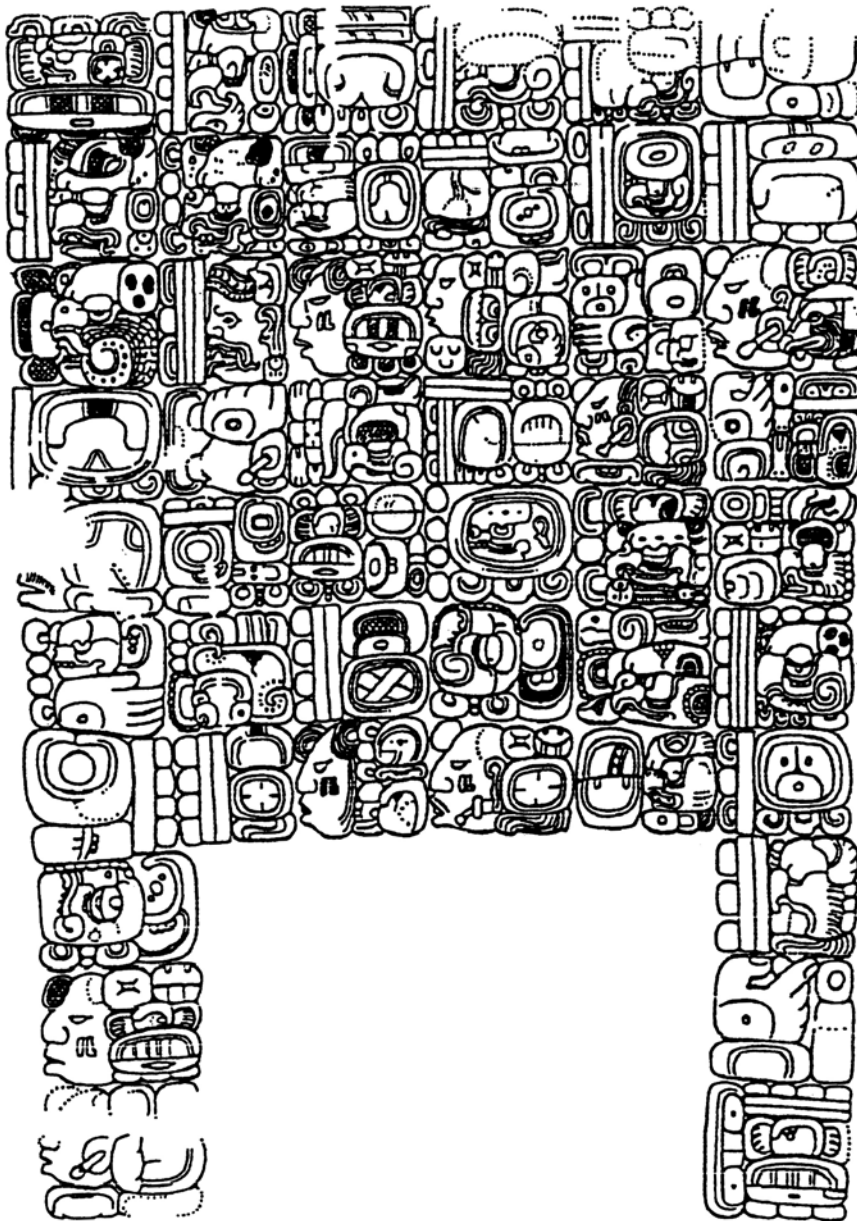
Above, the Observatory at Chichen Itza in Mexico



The Castle at Chichen Itza

THE BASICS OF ANCIENT MAYA WRITING

Maya writing is composed of various signs and symbols. These signs and symbols are often called 'hieroglyphs,' or more simply 'glyphs.' To most of us, these glyphs look like pictures, but it is often hard to say what they are pictures of, as for example, the following:



Glyphs from a stela at Piedras Negras in México

Unlike European languages, like English and Spanish, the ancient Maya writing did not use letters to spell words. Instead, they used a combination of glyphs that stood either for syllables, or for whole words.

We will call the glyphs that stood for syllables ‘syllable glyphs,’ and we’ll call the glyphs that stood for whole words ‘logos.’ (The technically correct terms are ‘syllabogram’ and ‘logogram.’)

It may seem complicated to use a combination of sounds and signs to make words, but we do the very same thing all the time. For example, you have seen this sign:



Everyone knows that this sign means “one way to the right.” The “one way” part is spelled out in letters, as usual. But the “to the right” part is given only by the arrow pointing to the right. Thus, this street sign is a combination of words and pictures that is very much like the way the Maya wrote things. After all, when a picture is worth a thousand words, why spell it out?

GLYPHS THAT STAND FOR SYLLABLES

The sounds in the ancient Maya language were mostly the same kind of sounds we have in English. They had the same vowels *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, and *u*. In most cases, these vowels are pronounced as they are in Spanish today. Thus, *a* is pronounced like the *a* in father; *e* is like a long *a* as in day; *i* is like a long *e* as in keep; *o* is a long *o* as in dose; and *u* is like a long *u* as in duke.

The Maya also had symbols for most consonants joined to a vowel. So, they had the syllables *cha*, *che*, *chi*, *cho*, *chu*; *la*, *le*, *li*, *lo*, *lu*; *ma*, *me*, *mi*, *mo*, *mu*; *ta*, *te*, *ti*, *to*, *tu*; and so forth. Following the norm for Spanish, we will let the letter *j* be pronounced like an ‘h,’ and *x* is pronounced like ‘sh.’

The ancient Maya had glyphs only for those syllables that ended in a vowel. When they needed a syllable that ended in a consonant, they would put two glyphs together. For example, if they wanted to make the sound like the English word ‘note’ they would use the syllables *no* + *to* and not pronounce the last *o*. An easy way to write this is: *no-t(o)* where the parentheses show that the last *o* is silent. Although the last vowel is silent, in Maya writing the second vowel will usually be the same as the first vowel. (This is called the rule of ‘synharmony.’) For example, you would generally not write ‘note’ as *no-t(e)* because the silent vowel is not the same as the vowel that comes before it.

There is also sometimes ‘disharmony’ between vowels, meaning that the silent vowel is different from the previous vowel. Disharmony was often usually used when the Maya wanted to make a vowel much longer than normal, or different in some other way from the normal vowel sound. Thus, for example, to write noote (where the double oo indicates a very long vowel), they could write *no-t(i)*. Since the silent vowel is *i* rather than the expected *o*, we know that they wanted the *o* to be long.

The ancient Maya had some sounds that are not used in English or Spanish, but are common in modern Maya languages. These sounds are called ‘glottal stops,’ or simply ‘stops.’ In English, these are combinations of a consonant and a vowel that are a little bit explosive when you say them together. For example, when you say *hot opal*, the *t* and the *o* sounds said together create a stop.

We signify stops with an apostrophe, for example *t'o* for the *t* and *o* sound in hot opal. Thus, *to* is pronounced like ‘toe,’ but *t'o* is pronounced like the *t o* sound from ‘hot opal.’ (In the ancient Maya language the consonant *b* was only used with a glottal stop, like the *b* in “rob.”)

Unlike most modern languages, the Maya usually had more than one way to write a syllable. Thus, for example, while we always write the sound *ma* as *m+a*, the Maya had many ways to write the sound *ma*. So, two people named Maria might spell their names very differently in Maya glyphs. As you will soon

learn, the Maya scribes were very creative and intelligent men and women who loved to have fun with their language.

Okay, so how did the Maya write their syllable glyphs? Look at the chart on the next page and you will see.

This chart is called a *syllabary* (kind of like an alphabet, except that it contains syllables instead of just letters). If you want to know the glyph for *ma* you only need to go to the square for *ma* and see the glyphs that you can use for that sound. So, you

can write *ma* as  , as  , as  , or as  .

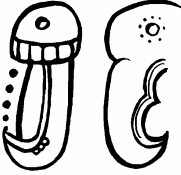
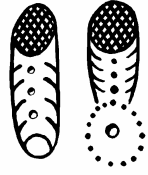
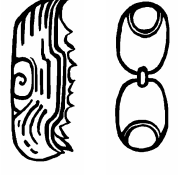

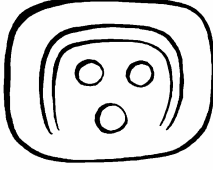
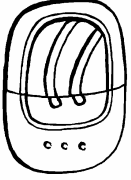

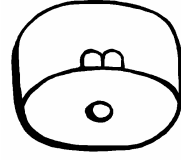


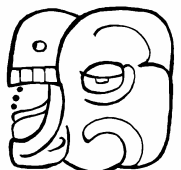


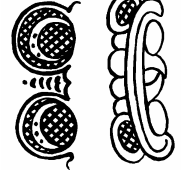

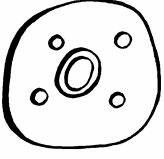
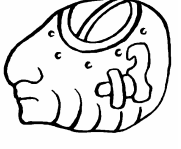

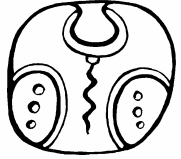




You get the idea. The same goes for many of the other syllables as well.

You've probably noticed that there are some squares where there are no glyphs. This is because there are still parts of Maya writing that is not known. The blank squares are syllables whose glyphs no one knows. (If you keep studying Maya glyphs, perhaps you will be the one who discovers these syllables.)

When we write a word using the syllables that make up that word, we say that we are writing the word 'phonetically,' which simply means we are writing it with sounds.



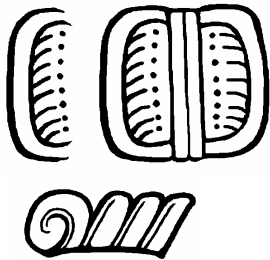
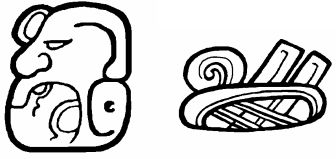
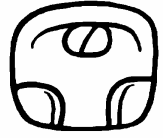


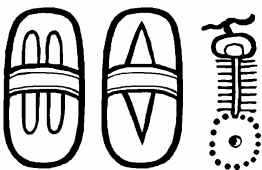








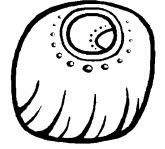
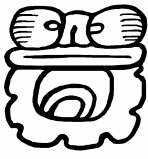

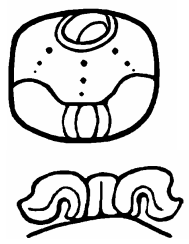

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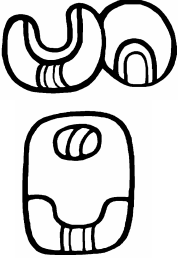






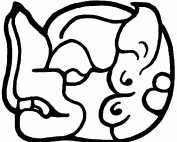

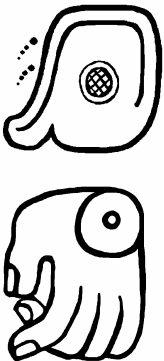
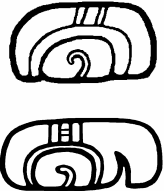


p r e v o w e i s					
					
					
					
b					
					
					

	a	e	i	o	u
ch					
ch'					
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	a	e	i	o	u
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	a	e	i	o	u
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GLYPHS THAT STAND FOR WHOLE WORDS


As we said, Maya writing is a combination of glyphs that stand for syllables, or “syllable glyphs,” and glyphs that stand for whole words, or “logos.” There are 200 to 250 syllable glyphs that were used in Classical Maya writing, and about 500 logos.

So that we don’t confuse the glyphs for logos with the glyphs for syllables, we will write the names of the glyphs for logos in all capital letters.

For example, the color *white* can be represented by the logo

SAK  . The word for *sky* or *heaven* can be written with the

logo CHAN  . These are logos because they stand for whole words, without building up the word from its syllables.

Sometimes a logo looks like the thing it stands for. For example the glyph  means “jaguar,” and it actually looks like a jaguar. When a logo actually looks like the thing it stands for, we call it a ‘pictogram’.

Since the Maya liked to use a lot of variety and have fun when they wrote things, they used a combination of logos and syllable glyphs to create words. Thus, different scribes might choose different combinations of glyphs to write the same word. And since scribes were usually also artists, they would use their

creativity and carve or draw the same glyph differently. Thus, while some aspects of Maya writing follow precise rules, other parts vary depending upon the scribe. As you learn to write in Maya glyphs, you should stick to the rules, but like the ancient Maya scribes, be creative as well.



WRITING WORDS WITH GLYPHS

Now suppose we want to write the word for ‘jaguar’ in Maya script. The ancient Maya word for jaguar was *b’alam* (or more precisely, *b’ahlam*). (Remember that the *b’* simply indicates a glottal stop after the letter *b*.) The following 5 groups of glyphs are all perfectly correct ways to write the word *b’alam*, or jaguar.



B’ALAM



ba’ la
ma





The glyph on top is basically just a picture of a jaguar. This is the pictogram (and the logo) for *B'ALAM*.

Next, the word *b'alam* is written using the sounds that make up the word. That is, the word is written phonetically.

Remember, to write a word phonetically we break up the word into syllables. So *b'alam* is rewritten as *b'a-la-m(a)*. The parentheses around the last *a* shows that it is silent. So, if you go to the syllabary and find the squares for *b'a* and *la* and *ma*, then place them all together, you will get the glyph for *b'alam* shown on the second row of the illustration. As we explain later, when glyphs are placed together to form one group, they will be read more or less from left to right and from top to bottom.

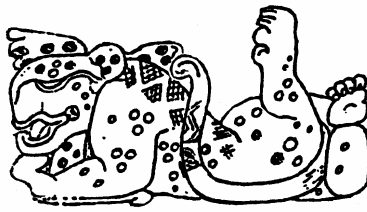
The three bottom glyphs in the illustration are combinations of the pictogram *B'ALAM*, and the sounds that make up the word. The pictogram is included in these glyphs for *b'alam*, but also the glyphs for one or more of the syllables are included. When a word is written in this way, it is normal to include the first and/or last syllables, but not the middle syllables of the word. You can think of these extra syllables as 'helper syllables' for the logo or

for the pictogram. (Technically, these are known as ‘phonetic complements.’)

Another example is the glyph for heaven or sky, which we saw earlier. We can write heaven/sky as . But, a more common form is . This glyph block contains the logo for heaven/sky, plus the helper syllable *na* underneath. This helper makes it easier for us to recognize and pronounce the glyph. The second form is a logo plus a syllable glyph, *CHAN-n(a)*, with the final *a* being silent.

Other than being creative, it is not clear why the Maya would include the syllables for a word when the pictogram for the word is given. But, for clarity, we do the same thing. For example, we all know that a big red octagon means STOP. Yet, usually within that big red octagon there is also the word STOP written out.

We use shortcuts for words much like the Maya did as well. For example, we use the first and last letter of many words as a way to abbreviate the words, (Dr. for doctor, or hr. for hour). Also, we use the first letters of a string of words to stand for the whole group of words (for example, NYC for New York City, JFK for John Fitzgerald Kennedy, or DA for District Attorney). Also, we frequently use abbreviations that pick up the most prominent sounds in a word (for example, X-LRG for Extra-Large, pls for please). The Maya used syllables instead of letters like we do, but the idea is really the same.



A Full Body Glyph for B'ALAM

BLOCKS OF GLYPHS

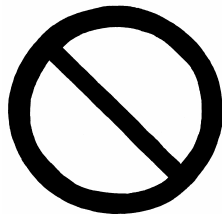
The glyphs for *b'alam* show that an ancient Maya word was often a combination, or block, of several other glyphs. (The technically correct term is a 'collocation' of glyphs.) Usually there is the main sign or glyph, together with other glyphs that serve as prefixes, suffixes, superscripts, and subscripts. We have all these in our language too. For example, think about the simple word *do*. If we say *undo*, *do* is the main word (like the main sign), and *un* is the prefix. If we say *doable*, *do* is the main word and *able* is the suffix. We can also say *undoable*, which has both a prefix and suffix to the main word *do*.

Also like ancient Maya, we use subscripts and superscripts, but usually more in mathematics and science than in everyday speech. For example, 3^2 (3 squared) has the main number 3 and the superscript 2. The sign for water H_2O uses the subscript 2.

We can do the same thing with signs and pictures instead of words and numbers. For example look at the following picture. Here we have the main sign (a logo, and a pictogram) of a smoking cigarette:



And below we have the secondary sign (a logo) for 'No' or 'Do Not:'



When we put them together, we get 'No Smoking:'



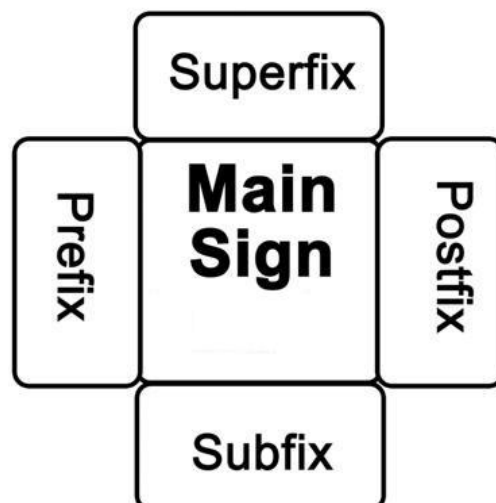
Of course we use signs instead of words in many other ways as well. We all know what is meant by a thumbs up, a wink, a shrug of the shoulders, or a tapping of the foot. No words are needed. The sign works just fine, if not better.

Even in everyday writing we use symbols that stand for whole words. Everyone knows that \$, #, %, and ÷ stand for the words *dollar*, *number*, *percent* and *divided by*. In fact, all of our numerals are logos. For example 4, 7, and 21 are logos for the words *four*, *seven*, and *twenty-one*.

On the computer we also use many signs (or “icons,” which are just pictograms) instead of words. To save to disk, we click the picture of the disk; to print we click the picture of the printer; to open a file we click the picture of the open file folder.

Similarly, companies have their logos, countries have their flags, and religions have their signs (the cross, the star of David, the crescent, etc.). Thus it is easy to see that like the Maya, we use signs all the time. The only difference is that we don’t use signs very much when we write.

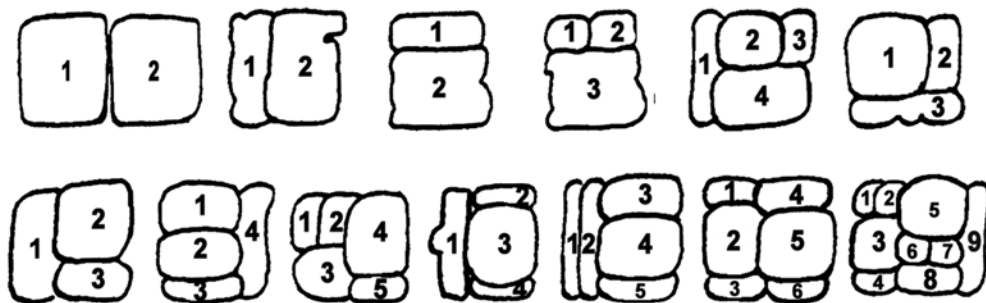
Now all we need to know is how the Maya put together all their signs, symbols, and glyphs to make something that could be understood. Here is a picture of the parts in a simple glyph block.



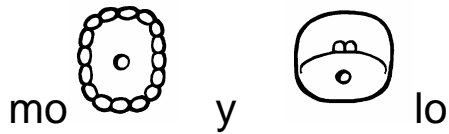
As shown, the main sign in the middle will usually be the biggest sign in the group. In ancient Mayan, like Spanish or English, only a few of all the possible prefixes, suffixes, etc. will be used in a single word.

To make sense of a word, we have to know the order of the parts. For example, the word ‘undoable’ makes sense, but ‘abledoun’ and ‘dounable’ do not make any sense. The normal order of the parts in ancient Maya glyph blocks was roughly from left to right and from top to bottom.

The problem is that glyph blocks could get a lot more complicated than the simple one shown above. Here is a guide to reading more complicated glyph blocks in the right order.



Finally, sometimes the Maya would combine two glyphs into one single glyph. This is called a ‘conflation’ of glyphs. For example, take the syllables *mo* and *lo*. The glyphs for these are



To write *mo-lo* the Maya would combine the two glyphs above to get



Now, believe it or not, you are ready to start writing words in Maya glyphs. In the next chapter, we will show you how to write your name in Maya glyphs, and then in the following chapter how to write the name of your town.

Be creative, and have fun!



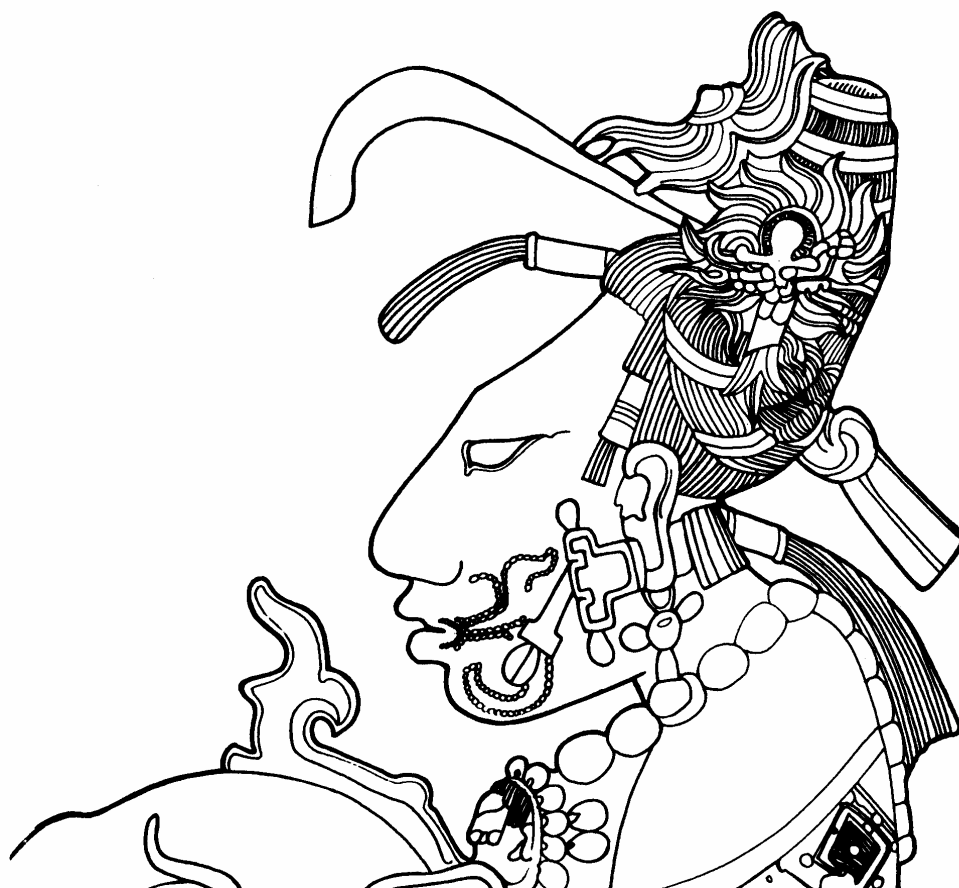
In Maya myths, scribes were often shown as monkeys. Like the monkey, the scribe always seems to have fun.



Chapter 2

How To Write Your Name

In Maya Glyphs



Lady Xook of Yaxchilán

In this chapter we will teach you how to write your name in Maya glyphs. We will take you through the process, step by step.

Step 1. Divide your name into Maya syllables.

As explained above, written Maya syllables always end in vowels, although at times the vowels were silent. So, to start, you will divide your name into syllables that end in vowels. Thus, you may have one or more ‘extra’ syllables when you write your name in Maya syllables. Remember too, when you need a syllable with a silent vowel, the silent vowel should be the same as the vowel that comes before it.

For example, if your name is Ana, you have it easy. You can write Ana as *a-na*. Both syllables end in vowels, just as you want.

If your name is Adam, it is a little harder. But, using the silent vowel rule, Adam can be written as *a-da-ma*. Here the last *a* is silent, so it is better to write it as *a-da-m(a)*. Note that we chose *ma* as the last syllable (rather than *me*, *mi*, *mo*, or *mu*) because we want the silent vowel to be the same as the vowel in the syllable that comes before it.

The silent vowel can also come somewhere in the middle of the name. For example, if we write Antonio in Maya syllables, we get *a-n(a)-to-ni-o* .



Step 2: Find your syllables in the Syllabary Chart

After you've divided your name into syllables, look in the syllabary chart to find the Maya glyphs for each syllable. If you find glyphs for all the syllables, that is great.

What if you know the syllables you need, but one or more of the squares you need in the chart is empty? If the square you need is empty, it means that the Maya glyph for that syllable is not known. For example, suppose you need the syllable *wu*. In the syllabaries, there is nothing in the squares for *wu*. In these cases use *consonant+a* plus the vowel you need. So, for example, the correct substitution for *wu* is *wa+u*.

Now, what if your name has a consonant that isn't even in the syllabary? A common case is a name that contains an *r*. Suppose your name is Maria, and so the syllables are *ma-ri-a*. As you will see, there aren't any *r* syllables in the syllabary at all. This is because the ancient Maya did not have words that had *r* sounds.

So, we have to make a substitution that sounds similar. For Maria, we would write ma-li-a. This may seem unfair, but it is okay. All we are doing is changing the name a little bit to reflect how the ancient Maya would probably pronounce your name. (We do this all the time ourselves for names of people and places in other countries. For example, in Italy they say Roma, but in the United States we say Rome.)

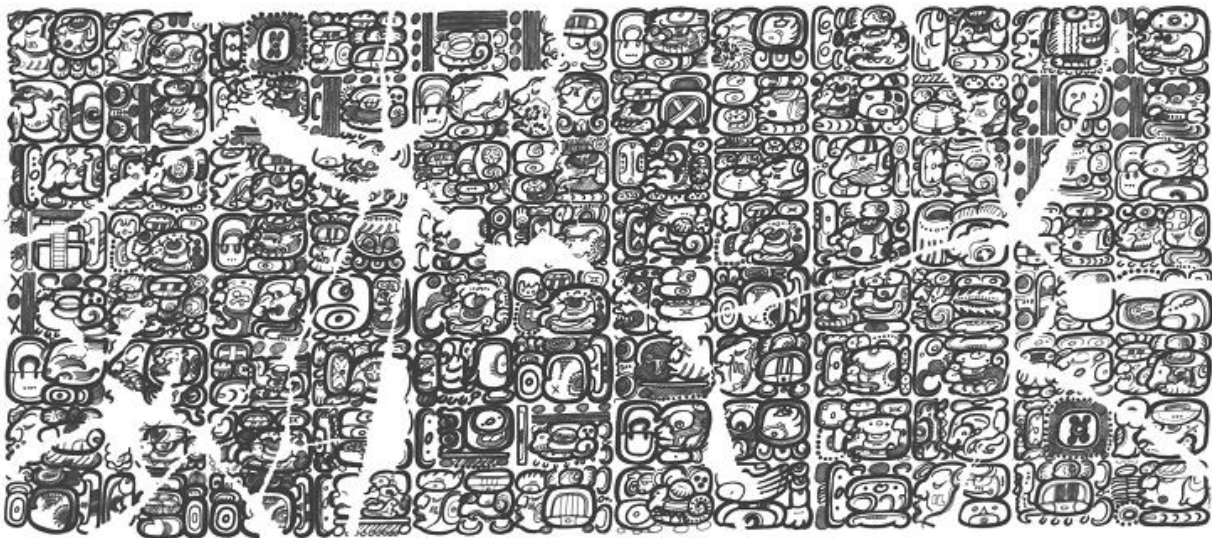


Table of 96 Glyphs, Palenque Mexico

Here are some other substitutions that you may need:

CONSONANT SUBSTITUTIONS:

C (soft as in Cindy) - Use **S+vowel** (i.e. sa, se, si, so, or su)

C (hard as in Cathy) - Use **K+vowel**

D Use **T+vowel**

F Use **P+vowel**

G (soft as in George) - Use **Ch+vowel** or **T+vowel**

G (hard as in Gary) - Use **K+vowel**

J Use **Ch+vowel** or **T+vowel**

Ph Use **P+vowel**

Q Use **Ku+W+vowel** [Ex. qua=ku+wa and qui=ku+wi]

R Use **L+vowel**

Sh Use **X+vowel** [X is pronounced as 'sh']

St Use **Tz+vowel** [Ex. Kristy = ka-li-tzi]

Th Use **T+vowel** or **X+vowel**

V Use **W+vowel**

Z Use **Tz+vowel**

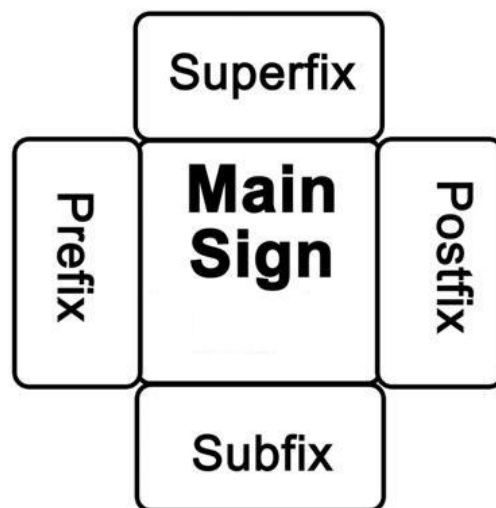
Now, before picking out the glyphs for each syllable in your name (or its substitution), there is one more thing you must do: pick a "main" syllable. If your name has 2 syllables, use the syllable that is accented when you pronounce your name. If your name has 3 or 5 syllables, the main syllable should usually be the

middle syllable. But if your name has 4, or 6 syllables, you should choose one of the syllables near the middle of your name to be the main syllable. Ideally, this syllable should be a syllable that is emphasized in the pronunciation of your name, and it should be a syllable that has a nice square-shaped glyph in the syllabary chart. (For example, for Antonio, you would use *to* as the principal syllable.)

Step 3: Place the Glyphs in a Glyph Block

So now we want to make a glyph block of the syllables in your name. Remember the skeletons from the last chapter that shows how individual glyphs are placed together to make a glyph block, or in our case, to make a whole name.

[Prefix and Superfix for syllables that come before the main syllable]



[First syllable in name usually goes in Prefix space]

[Postfix and Subfix for syllables that come after main syllable]

The main sign is where you will put the main syllable in your name. If possible, the main syllable glyph should be one of the bigger square shaped glyphs. The syllables that come before the main syllable will be in the prefix and superscript positions, and the very first syllable usually goes in the space for the prefix. The syllables that come after the main syllable will go in the positions for the suffix and the subscript. You should try to use smaller glyphs for all the syllables, except for the main syllable.

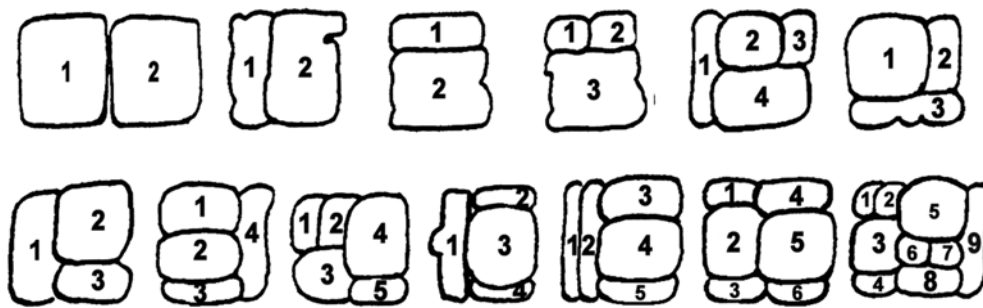
If, for example, your name has five syllables, the first syllable goes in the prefix position and the second syllable goes in the superscript position. The middle syllable will usually be the main syllable, and so go in the position for the main glyph. Then the next-to-last syllable will go in the suffix position, and the last syllable will go in the subscript position.

Wherever possible, all the syllable glyphs should be bunched around the main glyph, and in fact they should touch it. You should rotate each glyph to make it fit closely with the main glyph. You can also stretch out one or more glyphs as needed to make one nice group. In the end, you want something that looks like a square with rounded corners, sort of like a square shaped pebble.

You might notice that some of the glyphs have an open part on one side. Think of this part as the 'suction cup' for the glyph. This is the part of the glyph that you want to use to hook up or stick the glyph onto the main sign.

Of course, you may not need to use all the positions. That's okay. Just use what you need.

If your name has more than 5 syllables, or if you just want to experiment with different placements, use the placements in the following chart:



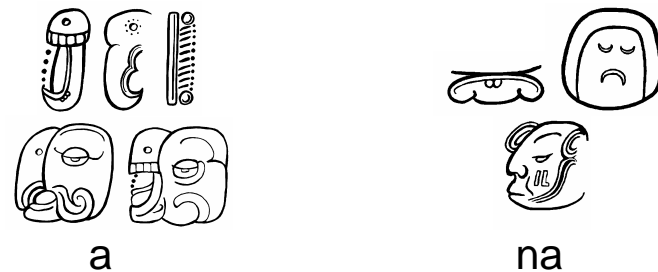
Be creative. Experiment. Make your glyph personal and something you really like. And remember, you should follow the rules, but otherwise it is good to play around and have fun.

Once you've made the glyph for your first name, think about how you want to make glyphs for your other names. The process is exactly the same. Go back to Step 1 and follow the same steps to spell any name you like in Maya glyphs.



SOME EXAMPLES

Let's start with an easy example and suppose again that your name is Ana. We can easily write Ana in Maya syllables as *a-na*. Looking at the syllabary we see that we have a nice selection of ways to write these two syllables. These are



If Ana is your name, you can choose which glyphs to use for the syllables of your name. If you like animals, you might choose one of the animal heads on the left. Then, you could write your name as:



Now let's take a name that is just a little harder --- Alan. In Maya syllables, Alan is written as *a-la-n(a)*, where the parentheses indicates that the last *a* is silent. The glyphs for each syllable are as follows:



a



la



na

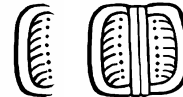
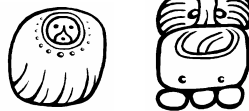
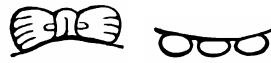
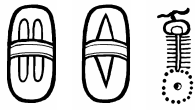
If your name is Alan, you get to decide how to write your name, but here's one nice way:



a la
n(a)

Now let's try something a little harder. Suppose your name is Thomas. To write this name in Maya glyphs, we first write break the name into the syllables *ta-ma-s(a)*, which sounds like the name Thomas, remembering that the *a* in parenthesis is silent. Here we have a name that we pronounce in 2 syllables, but has 3 Maya syllables.

Next, we go to the syllabary, where we see that we have quite a selection of glyphs to choose from for each syllable. From the syllabary, the possibilities are

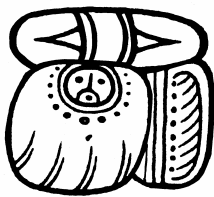


ta

ma

sa

Now we choose the syllables we like and place them in the right order in a glyph block to spell the name. Here are two beautiful possibilities:



ta
ma s(a)

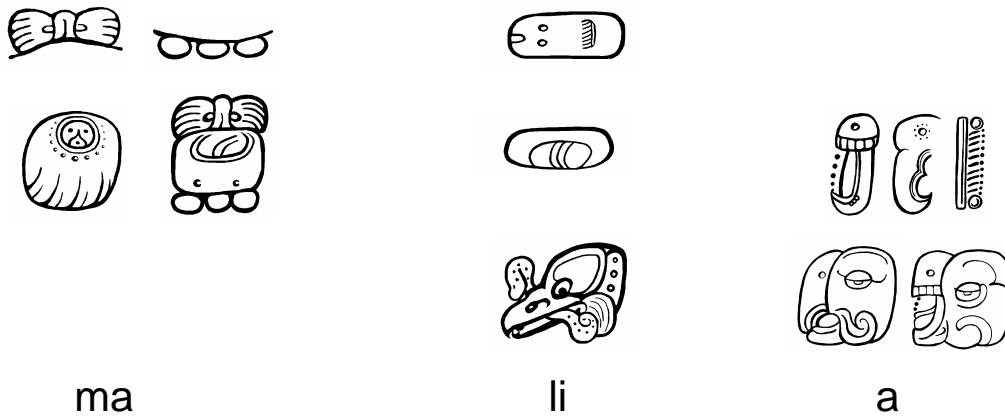


ta
ma s(a)

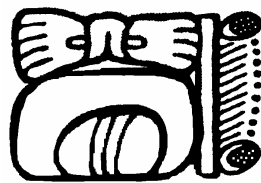
Make sure that you can see the three syllables *ta-ma-s(a)* in each of these two spellings of Thomas.

As you can see by now, there are always many ways to write a name in Maya glyphs, so in the end the way you spell your name can be very unique to you.

As a final example let's write the name Maria in Maya glyphs. Maria can be broken down into the syllables *ma-ri-a*. But, as we explained earlier, there was no *r* sound in the ancient Maya language, so we have to make a substitution and rewrite Maria as *ma-li-a*. Looking at the syllabary, we have the following:




Here's one way to put the syllables together to form the name Maria:



Note that in order to write Maria, we stretched the *li* syllable glyph to make it taller, and we rotated the final *a* syllable glyph 180 degrees. But if your name is Maria, you may choose to do it differently. After all, it's your name.


Now suppose you want to use Maya glyphs to write “My name is Ana.” How would we do that? We know how to write the name, so now all we need to know is how to write “my name is.”

Unlike us, when a Maya king or queen had something written about themselves, they would refer to themselves as “he” or “she” instead of “I.” And, to name someone, the Maya used a glyph that literally meant “it is his/her picture,” because whenever they named themselves, they also had a portrait. This glyph is

the logogram *B’AAH* , which is used together with a glyph that means “his,” “her,” “he,” or “she,” depending on the context. This glyph is simply *u*. As you will see in the syllabary,

one form for *u* is .

Thus, to say “his/her name is” or “he/she is known as,” you

can write , shown here with the phonetic complement *hi* on top. So, if you want to write “My name is Ana” you would write



Her name is



Ana.

Remember, of course, that when you say “she” or “he” you are referring to yourself, just as the ancient Mayas would do.

It is also possible, although much less common in ancient Maya writing, to refer directly to oneself with the words “me” and

“my.” The glyph for “me” and “my” is the syllable *ni*, .

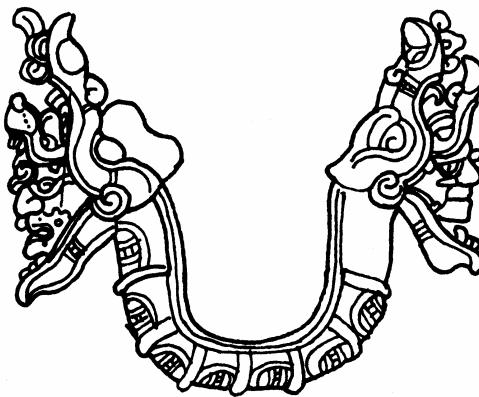
Combining this with the verb for “to be known as” we can write “I am known as Alan” with these glyphs



I am known as
(My name is)



Alan.



A Serpent Bar, a Mayan symbol of kingship.



Chapter 3

Maya Titles, Professions, and Family Relationships



A Maya ballplayer

PERSONAL TITLES

Like us, the Maya used various titles for different people. We say Mister, Mrs., Ms., Sir, Reverend, Dr., Your Honor, etc. The Maya did much the same thing.

We are not going to try to cover all the Maya titles because there are just too many. But we do want to give a few titles that you may want to use for yourself or for someone in your family.

To do this, we use the logo prefixes *AJ* and *IX*. For a man, we always use *AJ*. For a woman we can either use *IX* or use the two prefixes together: *IX AJ*. (Normally, Maya words are the same whether we are talking about a man or a woman, but these prefixes are an exception to that rule.)

AJ is most commonly written with the logo  or .

IX is written as a female head logo like one of these  or




. You can often recognize the *IX* title by the 'IL' letters on the cheek, and the crosshatched or curved hair on the forehead.


You can think of *AJ* as meaning 'Sir' and *IX* as meaning 'Lady.' In most cases, this works well enough.

The prefixes *AJ* and *IX* are very convenient because they also mean 'the one who' or 'he/she of.' Thus, we can use them to describe people who do various jobs, or people from various

places, and use them as titles. For example, the Maya referred to ‘he/she of the sacred books,’ who was probably like a special librarian who kept the sacred books of the kingdom. The Maya also referred to ‘she/he the administrator,’ who could be someone who worked in a place like an office.

The prefixes *AJ* and *IX* are usually used for adults. If you are young or still a student, there is another Maya title that you can use. The title is *ch’ok*, and can be roughly translated as “young,” “apprentice,” or anyone not fully mature or trained in some activity. The glyph for this title is *ch’o-k(o)* , i.e.  . (The *ko* syllable is over the ear.)

Since you are learning to write with Maya glyphs, you might want to use ‘scribe’ as your title. Throughout the Maya world, writing and painting were considered more or less the same thing, and the Maya did not distinguish between painters and scribes. Thus, the title for scribe and the title for artist were one and the same. In many cases the job of the scribe was a very high ranking position and the scribe was very learned. It is thus not surprising that there is a title ‘he/she the artist-sage.’

The Maya word for painting and writing is *tz’ib’* (where *tz’* is the glottal stop form of *tz*). This word can be written phonetically in Maya syllables as *tz’i-b’(i)* with the glyph  . So, how do we write the title for a man who is a scribe or artist, or someone who likes to write stories? A scribe is just ‘one who writes.’ We now


know the glyph for ‘he who’ and the glyph for ‘to write.’ So, the glyph for scribe is just the combination of the two glyphs, i.e.




, or *AJ-tz'ib*, which means ‘he who writes.’ In another variation of the glyph for scribe, it is the picture that tells the whole

story  .

If we want the title for a woman who is a scribe, artist, or writer, we just use the symbol for *IX-* (instead of *AJ-*) in these


glyphs. Thus a lady scribe is given by the glyph  , which is *IX-tz'ib*.


If you are still a student and still learning about reading and writing, you may not yet be ready to call yourself a scribe. In such a case, you can combine the glyph for young (i.e. *ch'ok*) with the glyph for scribe. In fact, one way to write the word for “student” in

Maya glyphs would be to write “young scribe:” i.e.  for a

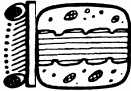

female student, and  for a male student.

We also know how to write the title of ‘artist-sage.’ In the Maya language an artist or sage is known as *itz'at* . In Maya

syllables this is *i-tz'a-t(a)*, and is written as  .



The glyph for book is  . This glyph is a pictogram of a Maya book called a “codex.” A codex was a book written on tree

bark, folded up like an accordion, and bound with jaguar skin. So, we can write a title for She of/ He of the Books, in other words, for a librarian or someone who makes sure the books are kept in good order. This would also be a good title for anyone who likes to read or look at books. The title glyph for such a person could

be  for a man, or  for a woman.


A title and a profession of much interest to people today, as well as to the ancient Maya, was that of ballplayer. The Maya ball game was similar to current-day soccer. Often Maya kings were (or pretended to be) stars of the ball game.

If you play soccer, or any other ball game such as baseball, football, volleyball, or basketball, you can use the title of ballplayer. In the language of the ancient Maya, the word for the ball game was *pitz*, which we write in Maya syllables as *pi-tz(i)*.

Two glyphs for these syllables are  and . Thus a man who played ball would use the title *AJ-pitz*, and a woman who played ball would use the title *IX-pitz*. Combining the parts,

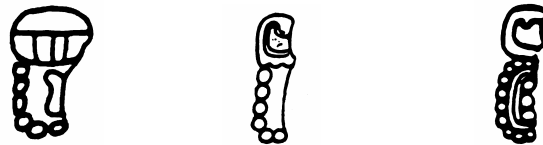
we have  for a male, and  for a female ball player.

Later on we are going to show you how to write whole sentences about yourself or someone in your family using Maya glyphs. You will want to keep the titles for people in mind so that you can use them then.

Perhaps you are wondering how the Maya wrote “ball field or ball court.” We know the glyph was  , but unfortunately we don’t know how the glyph was pronounced.


The Maya also had glyphs for titles like ‘Lord’ or ‘Divine One.’ These were used for the Maya gods, as well as Maya kings, who often posed as gods on earth.

Here then are some ways to write the title ‘Divine One’ in Maya glyphs.



TRADITIONAL AND MODERN MAYA PROFESSIONS

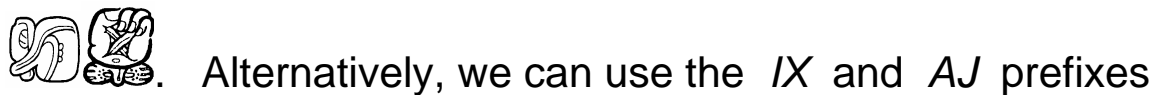
We can use Maya glyphs to indicate many traditional and modern Maya professions and activities. To do so, it is sometimes convenient to use the ending *-oom* , which means “someone who does,” or “someone who is going to do.” (The double *oo* simply indicates an unusually long *o* sound.) For example, the ancient Maya word for fish is *CHAY*, which is


depicted by the pictogram  . Thus the Maya word for fisherman is *CHAY-oom*, or *cha-yo-m(a)* in Maya syllables, because this means “he/she who fishes.” (Because we want an

unusually long *o* , we used disharmony and make the silent vowel different.) Thus, a glyph for a fisherman would be



Similarly the word for sewing or weaving is *chuy*, so the word for a weaver is *chuy-oom*. We can write this word in Maya syllables as *chu-yo-m(a)*. In glyphs, the word for weaver is thus



syllables,  “she of the weavings,” signifies a lady who weaves, or a lady who sells weavings or clothing.

What about someone who cooks or cleans? The Maya words for these activities are known as well. The word for washing or cleaning is *pok* , and the word for food (especially tortillas or tamales) is *waaj*. So, one way to refer to a man who cleans or takes care of a building is *AJ-pok-oom*. A woman who cooks, or works with food in any way, can be referred to as *IX-waaj*. One way to write these glyphs is as follows:




AJ po
ko
m(a)





IX wa j(i)
wa


Note the use of the ‘helper syllable’ in the spelling of *waaj*.



The Maya word for planting was *tz'ap*, which was written in

glyphs as . Can you see why this glyph block spells *tz'ap*? In fact, this glyph introduces another clever aspect of Maya writing called “infixing.” Infixing is when one glyph is placed inside another. In this case the syllable *pa* (or at least the tell-tale cross-hatching of the syllable *pa*) is placed totally within the syllable *tz'a*, thus giving the complete word *tz'ap*. This is usually written as *tz'a-[pa]*, where the square brackets indicate that the *pa* is infixed.

Thus, putting the pieces together, we get the word for farmer: *AJ tz'ap waaj* written in glyphs as  (literally, he who plants food) for a man, or  for a woman.

Finally, we should mention one very important job in the Maya world, that of ‘Day Keeper.’ A Day Keeper is a person who is very knowledgeable about the Maya calendar and the important days in the Maya year. (You will learn about the Maya calendar in the next booklet.) To write the title of Day Keeper, we can write

‘he/she of the days.’ The glyph for *day* is , and so the title

for a man who is a Day Keeper can be written as  , and  for a woman who is a Day Keeper.

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Family relations were important in the Maya glyphs. Like us, the most important relations for the ancient Maya were usually with their parents, their brothers and sisters, and with their husband or wife. In their inscriptions, the ancient Maya often named at least one of their parents together with their titles.

In the language of the ancient Maya there was no difference between the words for “son” and “daughter.” But they did use different glyphs if they were indicating the relationship with the father, or the relationship with the mother. Here are two common glyphs that were used for the relationships between children and their parents.



yu-ne

son or daughter of (father)



ya-AL

son or daughter of (mother)

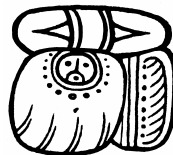
Thus, as an example, we can use these glyphs to describe the relationship between a girl named Ana and her brother Alan with their father named Thomas and their mother Maria. Using the glyphs above and the name glyphs that we wrote earlier, we have



Ana



daughter of



Thomas.

For Alan we have



Alan

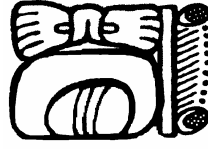


son of



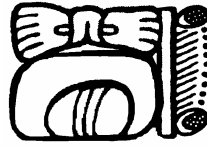
Thomas.

Similarly, the relationships between Ana and Alan and their mother Maria can be written as



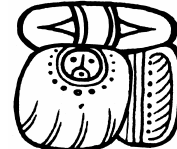
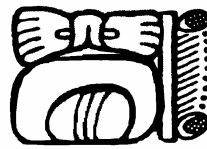
Ana daughter of Maria

and




Alan son of Maria .

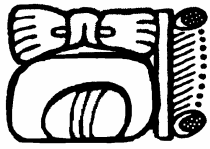
The Maya would also use glyphs to name both their mother and their father. In our example, we would have



Alan son of Maria (and) son of Thomas.

As shown here, when both parents are given, the Maya would list the mother first, and then the father.

One other glyph that is very important is the glyph for one's wife or husband. This glyph is  , *y-atan*, and so we can write



Maria




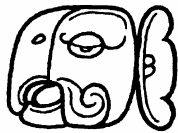
wife of



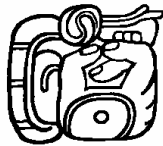
Thomas.

Finally, it is important to mention a glyph that is not just for family members, but is used when any two people do something together, or when one person witnesses something done by the

other person. The glyph is *yichnal* , which here is composed of the three parts *yi-chi-NAL*. If for example, if we want to say that Ana did something with her brother, we write



Ana



was accompanied by



Alan.



Mythical fisherman from ancient Tikal



Chapter 4.

Names of Towns

In Maya Glyphs



COMBINING NAMES AND TITLES

In most cases, we can write the name of a town in the same way we write the name of a person. That is, we break the name of the town into Maya syllables (or substitutes), find those syllables in the syllabary, and then place them together in a glyph block in order to spell out the name phonetically.

However, town names often give us the opportunity to be a lot more creative. The best examples are the many towns that are named after saints, and so we can use glyphs for sacred personages to create more interesting ways to write the names of the towns.


For example, many towns start with the word 'San,' for example, San Antonio, San Diego, San Francisco, and Santo Tomas. All these names are Spanish and use 'san' or 'santo' as the male form of 'saint.'

Similarly, there are towns named for female saints such as Santa Catarina and Santa Barbara. Santa is the title for a female saint in Spanish. There are also names like Santa Cruz and Santa Fe, which do not refer directly to saints, but which still contain the word for holy or divine.

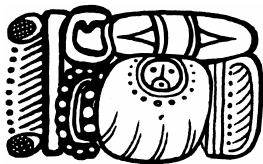
Also, of course, there are similar names in English, such as St. Paul, St. Peters, and St. Johns. In each case, the first word of the name means saint, holy, or divine.

A good glyph then for the towns that start with ‘San,’ ‘Santa,’ or ‘St.’ would be the glyph that means Divine One. We already know this glyph because it was one of the titles for people that we looked at in the last chapter.

Thus, for example, take Santo Thomas. In the last chapter we wrote several glyphs for Thomas, so that part is no problem. One very reasonable way then to write the name Saint Thomas is to combine one of the glyphs for ‘Divine One,’ with one of the

glyphs for Thomas. One way to do this is:  . Of course, there are also other ways to make a glyph for St. Thomas using other ways of writing Thomas and other glyphs for ‘Divine One.’

We can use names of towns to create a title for a person. For example, a title for a person from Saint Thomas could be ‘He/She of St. Thomas.’ To make such a title, we simply combine the glyph for ‘he of’ or ‘she of’ with the glyph for the name of the town. Here is how we can write ‘He of St. Thomas:’



USING LOGOS TO WRITE NAMES OF TOWNS

Some towns offer us a lot of opportunity to be creative. For example, take the town of San Antonio Aguas Calientes, a small Maya weaving town in Guatemala. (In Spanish, Aguas Calientes means ‘hot waters.’) We can quite easily break up the name Antonio into Maya glyphs as *a-n(a)-to-ni-o*, and we have several glyphs for each of these syllables. Here is one way to write Antonio phonetically as *a-n(a)-to-ni-o* :



n(a)
a to ni
o

The large glyph in the center is *to*. It is surrounded by *a* (left), *na* (above), *ni* (on the right), and *o* (below).

We can of course write the words ‘Aguas Calientes’ as Maya syllables, spelling the words out phonetically. But, it turns out that there is a glyph which means ‘fiery water place,’ which after all is what ‘aguas calientes’ means. The fiery water place glyph is





. This glyph block is just the glyphs for “fire / fiery” (on the left), “water” (in the center), and “place of” (above). Thus a great

way to write the whole name of the town San Antonio Aguas Calientes is to combine the glyphs for ‘Divine One,’ ‘Antonio,’ and ‘fiery water place.’ If we do this, we get



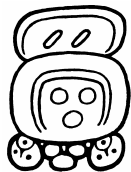
Another example is Quetzaltenango, the second largest city in Guatemala. To make a glyph for this city, you must understand what the name means. Breaking the word into its two parts gives: quetzal + tenango. The quetzal is the national bird of Guatemala. It lives in the rain forest and has long beautiful blue-green tail feathers. The ancient Maya often used these feathers as decorations and ornaments. The word *tenango* is a word that originated in ancient Mexico that means ‘place of.’ Thus, the name Quetzaltenango means ‘Place of the Quetzal.’

To write the name Quetzaltenango in glyphs, all we have to know are the glyphs for the quetzal bird and the glyph for ‘place of.’ There are glyphs for both. The glyph for ‘place of’ is the logo , and the glyph for quetzal is the pictogram . Putting these two together, we get the glyph for Quetzaltenango:



Like many cities and towns of Mesoamerica, Quetzaltenango also has a pre-Columbian name. The traditional name of Quetzaltenango is Xela, a name that is still used by many people today. We cannot write Xela using logos, but we can write it phonetically.

Normally we would want to divide Xela into two Maya syllables as *xe-la*. But, note that there is no Maya syllable *xe* in the syllabaries. In this case we have to use the rule that we gave earlier: If the consonant you want is in the syllabary, but not with the vowel that you need, use the consonant plus the vowel *a*, then add the vowel that you need. Thus, instead of *xe*, we use the two syllables *xa-e*. So, we write the name Xela as *x(a)-e-la*. Combining the glyphs for the three syllables, we create a glyph for Xela:



Make sure you can find each of the three syllables in the name.

We can use the logo for 'place of' in many names. For example, take the town of Chichicastenango in Guatemala, a town famous for its grand markets and outstanding crafts. As before, we know that *tenango* means 'place of,' and so we only have to write *chichicas* in Maya syllables. We do so as

chi-chi-ka-s(a), and we have glyphs for each of these syllables.

We will use  for *chi*,  for *ka*, and  for *sa*.

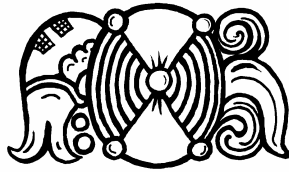
In this case, we can use a new rule in Maya writing. When a Maya scribe wanted to repeat a syllable, he or she could put two small dots to the left of the glyph. Thus, one quite beautiful way to write the name of Chichicastenango is



Like Quetzaltenango, 'Chichi' has a traditional pre-Columbian name, which is Chuwi La. To test your skill with Maya glyphs, try to write this name yourself as the Mayas would have:

chu-wi-la =

As a final example, we take the original name for the town of San Pedro La Laguna, an indigenous Tz'utujil village on the shores of Lake Atitlán in Guatemala. The indigenous name for this village is Tz'unun Ya. Dividing the name into Maya syllables, we have *tz'u-nu-n(u)-ya*. This name can be written with the following beautiful glyph block:




VOCABULARY

There are many examples of town names that we do not have to spell phonetically. Many towns contain words like mountain (or mount), lake, valley, port, east, west, north, south, green, black, white, tree, etc. There are Maya logos for all these words.

In this section, we present many of these logos so that you can use them to write the name of your town. The following glyphs are for words that are often used in the names of towns. But remember, for most words there is no logo. In those cases, you can write the name by writing out the syllables.

Here are some of the most useful glyphs with the ancient Maya words in parentheses:

Mountain or Mt. (*WITZ*): 

Stone or Rock (*TUUN*):  or 

The second glyph has the complement *ni*.

Lake or Water (*JA'*):



Pond (*NAAB'*):



Also means rain, water, and pool

Opening, Doorway (*PASIL*):



Written in syllables

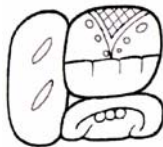
Valley (*YOKIB'*):



Grand, Big (*LAKAM*):



North (*XAMAN*):



Note the complements.

South (*NOHOL*):



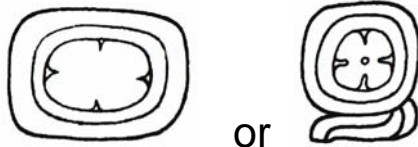
A combination of the logogram and phonetic complements.

East (*LAK'IN*):



The logogram plus the complement

Sun (*K'IN*):



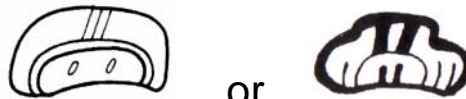
The second glyph has the complement *ni*.

West (*OCHK'IN*):



The hand on top is the verb *Och*, which means 'to enter.' Thus, this glyph literally means 'the sun enters.' As you know, the setting sun looks like it is entering the Earth in the west.

Blue or Green (*YAX*):



This glyph can also mean "blue-green" or "first."

Black (*IK'*):






White or Clear (*SAK*):





Red (*CHAK*):



Tree, Wood, or Forest (*TE'*):  or 

New (*TZI*): 

Fire or Hot (*K'AK'*):  or 

Earth or Land (*KAB*): 

And finally a very important glyph for place names is the logo:

Place of (*NAL*):  or  or 

The “Place of” glyph is usually, but not always, used as a superscript above the glyph for whatever it is a place of. You can use the logo *NAL* for the names of many cities and towns. In fact it is applicable to any name that ends in -ville, -burg, -ham, -ton, -town, -shire, -hampton, etc.

Keep in mind that you can be creative in making the name of the place you need. For example, if you need a word for Gulf, or Bay, or Sound, you can combine the glyph for 'big' with the glyph for 'lake.' Or if you need the word Port, you can combine 'opening' and 'water.' If you want a glyph for Coast or Shores, you can use the glyph for 'place of' over the glyphs for 'earth' and 'big water' side by side. If you need High, use the glyph for 'mountain.'

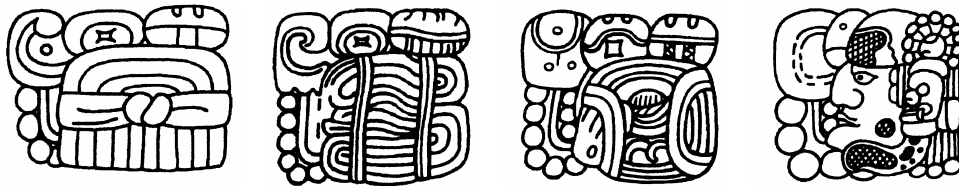
The possibilities are limitless.

GLYPHS OF THE GREAT MAYA CITIES

The Maya built fabulous cities throughout Mesoamerica. The area of the great Maya civilization included all of present-day Guatemala, much of southern Mexico, western Honduras, and parts of El Salvador and Belize. The cities of the ancient Maya were much like the city-states of the ancient Greeks. They would compete and fight among themselves, but they shared a common language, art, and culture.

There were many such Maya cities. In fact, archaeologists are still discovering Maya cities that have long been buried, as well as continuing to uncover and learn about Maya cities that have been known for many years.

Below you will find the “Emblem Glyphs” of many of the great Maya cities. These are not strictly place names, but probably stood for the political unit and perhaps even the ruling family, as well as for the city itself.



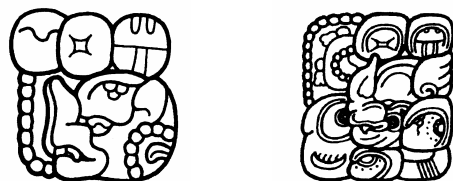
Tikal:

(Guatemala – 4 examples)



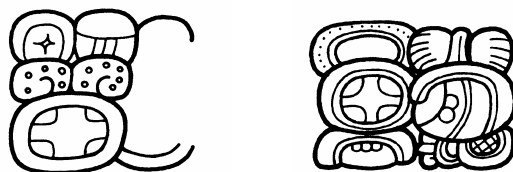
Palenque :

(Mexico – 3 examples)



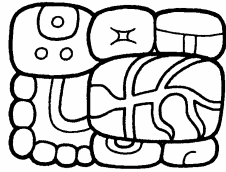
Copán:

(Honduras – 2 examples)



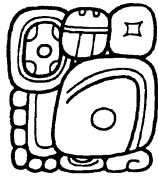
Caracol:

(Belize – 2 examples)



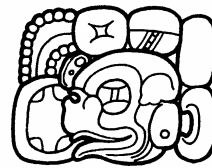
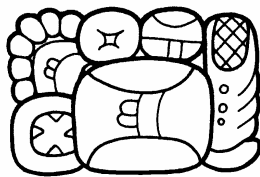
Quiriguá:

(Guatemala – 1 example)



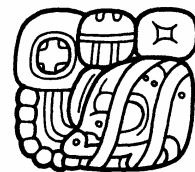
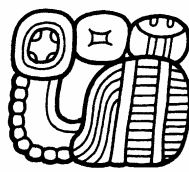
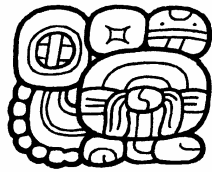
Yaxchilán:

(Mexico – 2 examples)



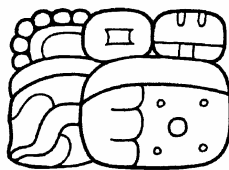
Toniná:

(México -- 2 examples)



Dos Pilas:

(Guatemala -- 3 examples)



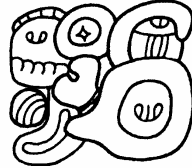
Piedras Negras:

(Guatemala -- 3 examples)



Naranjo:

(Guatemala -- 1 example)



Bonampak:

(Mexico -- 2 examples)



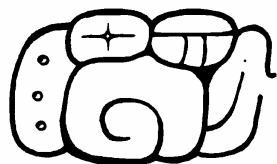
Seibal:

(Guatemala -- 1 example)



Calakmul:

(Mexico -- 1 example)



Altun Ha:

(Belize -- 1 example)

The map below shows each of these cities, as well as other important Maya cities. Make sure you know where each city was located.

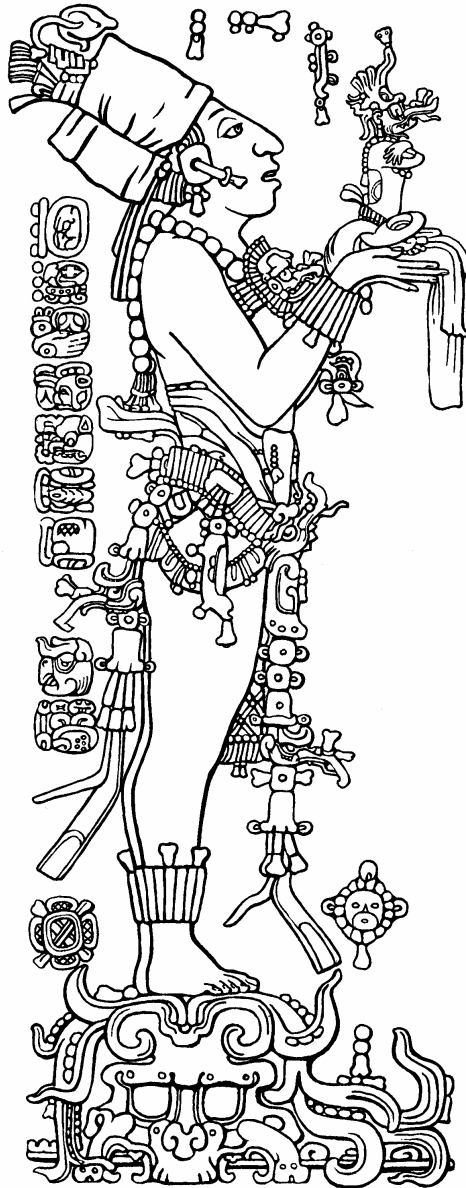




Chapter 5.

Putting It All Together

To Write Simple Sentences



WRITING SIMPLE SENTENCES WITH MAYA GLYPHS

Now we are going to put together many of the pieces of the puzzle that you've learned so far. There's only one more thing you have to learn about Maya glyphs. Reading Maya glyphs is much like reading the newspaper, top to bottom, then left to right -- with one very important difference. Instead of reading down one column at a time, you read across two columns at a time. You read these two paired columns to the bottom, then you go back to the top and read the next two columns from top to bottom. The following diagram shows how this works:

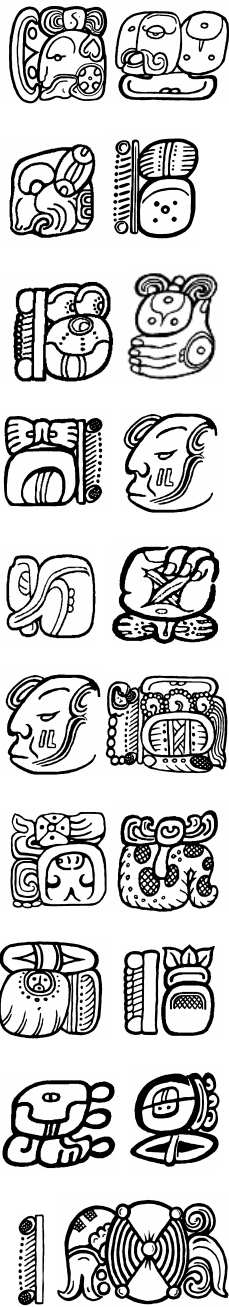


So, let's take two fictional ancient Maya students, Ana and her older brother Alan. Suppose you found their stelae shown below in the jungles of Mesoamerica. All the words on the stelae are words you've seen before. Stop and see if you can decipher what they are telling us about themselves. (It's okay to look back to find the glyphs that you may have forgotten. And don't forget to read the stela in paired columns.)

Ana's stela:



Now, Alan, not to be outdone by his younger sister, writes much more:



In these stelae, as was normal for the ancient Maya, the writer first gives his or her own name and titles, then the mother's name and titles, and then the father's name and titles. Also, as shown here, any reference to one's town usually comes after other titles and descriptions.

Take however much time you need to try to read these stelae on your own, before looking at the answers below...

Okay, here are the translations into everyday English:

Ana says, "***My name is Ana. I am a student. My mother is Maria of San Antonio.***"

Alan says, "***My (his) name is Alan. I am a student and ball player. My mother is Maria, a weaver from San Antonio Aguas Calientes. My father is Thomas, a farmer and wise man, from Tz'unun Ya***"

Simple sentences, beautifully written in Maya glyphs.



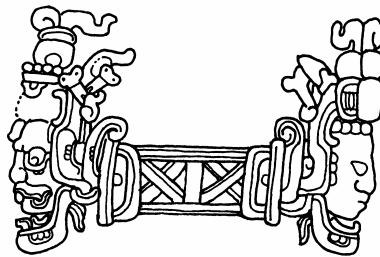
A Beautiful Maya Figurine Made of Clay



Conclusion

We have reached the conclusion our booklet on Maya glyphs. You should now know how to write your name and the names of one or two of your family members in Maya glyphs. You should also know how to write the name of your town. Putting it all together, you can write short sentences in Maya glyphs about yourself and your family.

Continue to study the Maya syllable glyphs and logos and memorize as many of them as you can. We will use them in our continuing study of the ancient Maya.



A ceremonial bar used by Maya kings



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Tedlock, Dennis

Popol Vuh

Credits for Images

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A Maya King of Copán