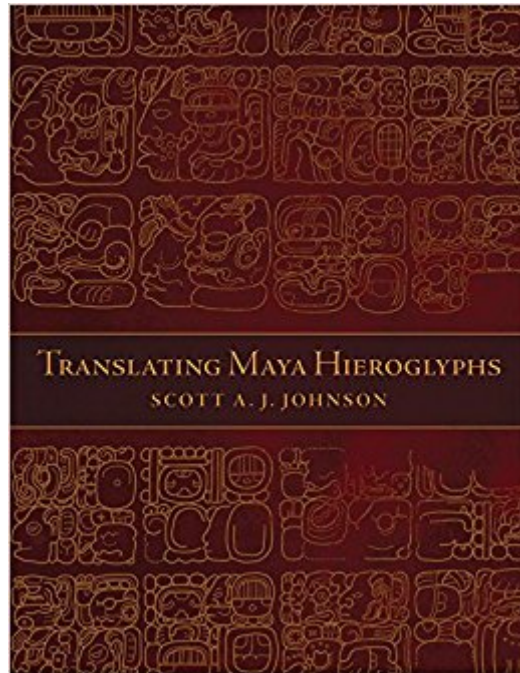




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Translating Maya Hieroglyphs



Synopsis

Maya hieroglyphic writing may seem impossibly opaque to beginning students, but scholar Scott A. J. Johnson presents it as a regular and comprehensible system in this engaging, easy-to-follow textbook. The only comprehensive introduction designed specifically for those new to the study, *Translating Maya Hieroglyphs* uses a hands-on approach to teach learners the current state of Maya epigraphy. Johnson shows readers step by step how to translate ancient Maya glyphs. He begins by describing how to break down a Mayan text into individual glyphs in the correct reading order, and then explains the different types of glyphs and how they function in the script. Finally, he shows how to systematically convert a Mayan inscription into modern English. Not simply a reference volume, *Translating Maya Hieroglyphs* is pedagogically arranged so that it functions as an introductory foreign-language textbook. Chapters cover key topics, including spelling, dates and numbers, basic grammar, and verbs. Formal linguistic information is accessibly explained, while worksheets and exercises complement and reinforce the material covered in the text. Glyph blocks and phrases drawn from actual monuments illustrate the variety and scribal virtuosity of Maya writing. The Maya writing system has not been fully deciphered. Throughout the text, Johnson outlines and explains the outstanding disputes among Mayanists. At the end of each chapter, he offers sources for further reading. Helpful appendices provide quick reference to vocabulary, glyph meanings, and calendrical data for students undertaking a translation. The study of Maya glyphs has long been an arcane subject known only to a few specialists. This book will change that. Taking advantage of the great strides scholars have made in deciphering hieroglyphs in the past four decades, *Translating Maya Hieroglyphs* brings this knowledge to a broader audience, including archaeologists and budding epigraphers.

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Customer Reviews

“This long-overdue, richly illustrated introduction to the beauty and complexity of Maya script will be a welcome resource to students and scholars alike. Scott A. J. Johnson provides not only a valuable teaching tool but a way to bring archaeologists, linguists, and historians of the Maya up to date on the many advances made in understanding Maya texts over recent decades.”—Martha Macri, coeditor of *The New Catalog of Maya Hieroglyphs: The Codical Texts*

Scott A. Johnson is Research Associate in the Department of Anthropology at Washington University in St. Louis. He is the author of several articles and book chapters on Maya archaeology and epigraphy.

Very long overdue work. In fact, I believe it's the first of its kind. It's laid out like a language text. I'm a linguist and have used hundreds of language texts and this one looks to be quite a good one, in spite of the fact that you "get your feet wet" extremely quickly. By exercise 1.6, you are already matching up the approximately 175 logograms, their bi-syllabic "alphabet" from a table to examples in the exercise. (They are not necessarily identical to what's in the table either; additionally, each town or even scribe had his own style.) There are technically only 100 slots for the logograms (20 consonants x 5 vowels), but in one case, the [u] logogram manifests itself 11 different ways, depending on context from a number of factors. A glyph may consist of one or many parts (the most "meaning"-full one is indeed full, consisting of 13 parts, or individual words, prefixes, suffixes, superfixes, or other affixes, etc.). Each part of the glyph is read in a strict order (yes, there are also exceptions). pp. 26 and 31 show pictorially in which order parts of a glyph are read, and the 8 steps to reading a glyph and in which order, respectively. There is a diagrammed representation in the form of a square divided into 12 boxes of various sizes and shapes. It shows in which order you read the pieces of the glyph. In this case, you divide the main square into four pieces, and beginning with the upper left hand corner and you treat each quarter of the main square sort of as its own individual logogram, then go to the upper right hand corner set of glyphs, lower left, and lower right. The set of steps is no less challenging, e.g., 1. if x, go to step 2, otherwise step 6; if x, go back to 3, otherwise go to step 8, etc. until the entire glyph is read. Well, I just wanted to give a small idea of

what this is like in the beginning of the book. There is also a rather lengthy chapter on numbers and dates, a chapter on grammar, incorporating the glyphs, etc. One thing I've long been plagued with is the difference between the transcription and transliteration systems. The book explains also about this. It makes Japanese look like a piece of cake, but I'm the type that loves challenges. I am very grateful for this work; I've been waiting a long time for it. As a side note, I'm also excited for another long overdue work: Martha J. Macri's *The New Catalog of Maya Hieroglyphs: The Classic Period Inscriptions and The New Catalog of Maya Hieroglyphs, Volume Two: Codical Texts*. Only just over a year old, it gives an exhaustive inventory of the Maya glyphs known up to that point. Check for these two works. Well, I've been going on enough. Just very happy about the possibility of finally learning the language I've been limping through on and off for over 20 years.

As an undergraduate student I have personally begun to study Mayan hieroglyphic writing in complete isolation and working from a variety of sources that ranged from databases containing peer reviewed academic articles, to hard to find books. Alas, all of the material I went through in times now gone by, has been compiled into an incredibly beneficial package. This is to say that although the material I found on my own was quite satisfyingly engaging, I realized how much time was needed to search for these materials. This process may have once deterred people whose interest was piqued but found this obstacle too bothersome to pursue further. However, this book gathers up all of the basic concepts and organizes each chapter in a way that makes sense and that helps to make the process less overwhelming. All in all, if you're a student like myself and have been told that this line of study is meant for a graduate student but could care less, buy this book. You shall not regret it.

This book on the Maya hieroglyphs is a textbook to teach students how to read the glyphs. It is an excellent resource for self-study, including exercises to ensure that you have understood what is being taught. The older study guide, Michael Coe and Mark van Stone's *Reading the Maya Glyphs*, remains an excellent resource, but is now a little out-of-date, given the major advances that have been made since it was published. Johnson mentions the major academic controversies in the ancient Maya language, and seems to present an unbiased discussion of the differing viewpoints. The book is comprehensive, including sections on reading order of glyph blocks and inscriptions, calendar calculations, grammar, as well as a syllabary, a dictionary and a Maya to English lexicon. This book can be recommended as an excellent resource for anyone wanting to learn to read hieroglyphic

inscriptions.

Perfect gift for brother who is obsessed with Maya history.

Excellent book !

This book is exelent.. it has helped me out alot,and i will be picking this book up from time to time..
absolutly worth the money

Excellent book. Well written, and plenty of diagrams. Appropriate exercises to test comprehension.

Good basic Maya text. Assignments are very helpful for teaching environment.

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