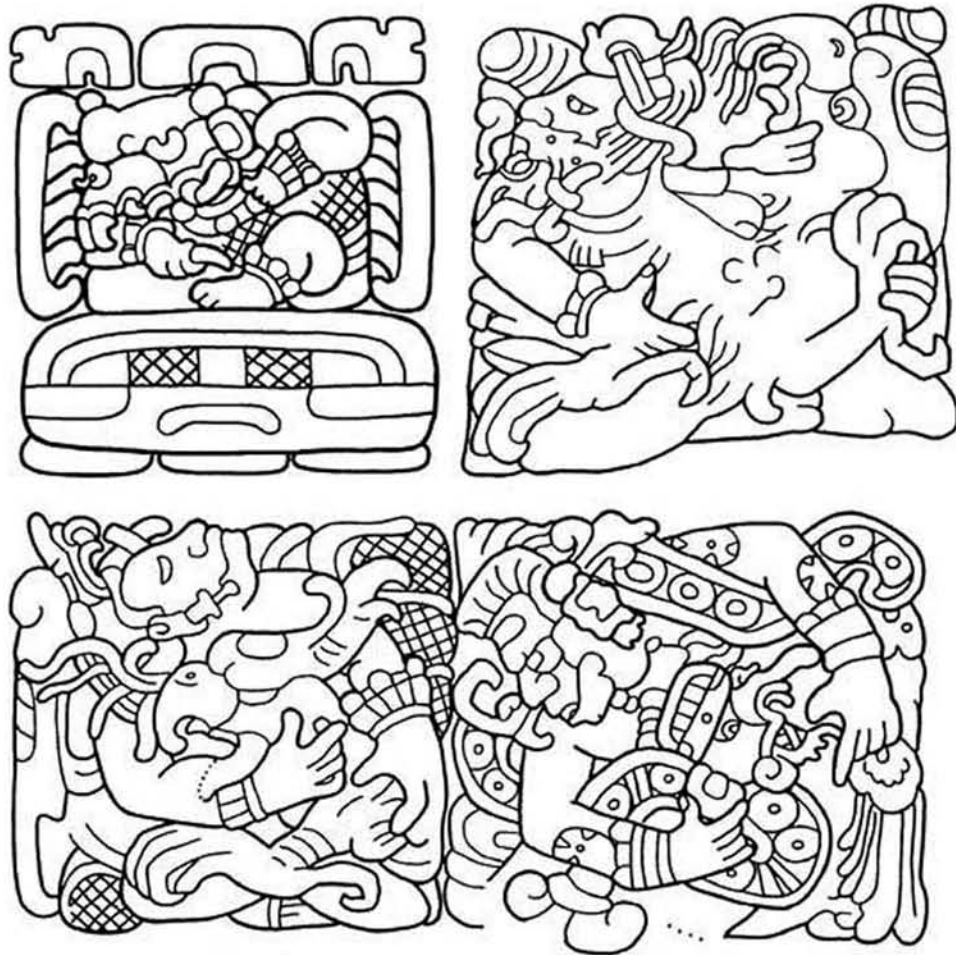


Hieroglyphic Decipherment Guide



compiled & revised by Inga E. Calvin
2012

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Persons using this guide should be aware that the field of Maya hieroglyphic studies is ongoing and decipherments are subject to revision and intense debate regarding spelling, grammar, tense aspect or meaning. Any mistakes are the responsibility of the compiler, Inga E. Calvin.

ANY USE OF THIS GUIDE FOR SALE OR PROFIT IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED.

PSS - Vessel Typology

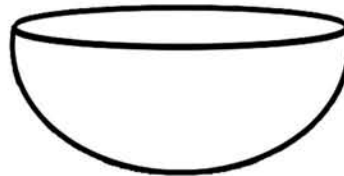
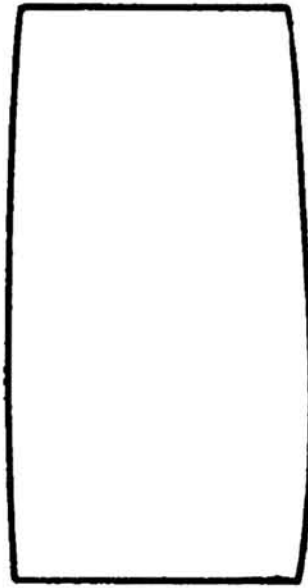
yu-k'ib
his drinking
vessel



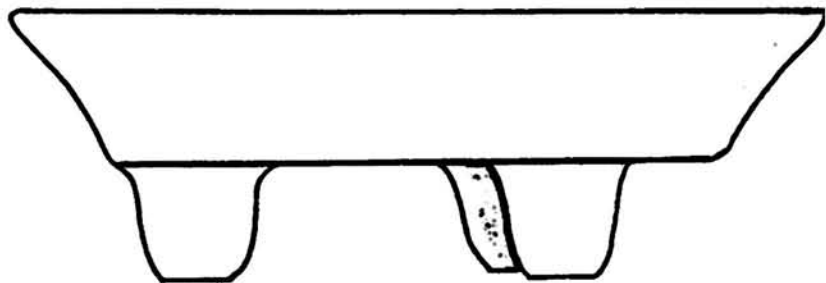
u-jaay
the cup of



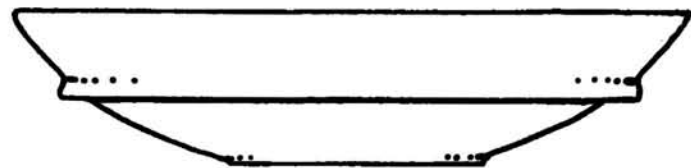
yuub



'u jawante



'u lak



(after Houston, et al. 1989:723, Figure 2 & Stuart 2003)

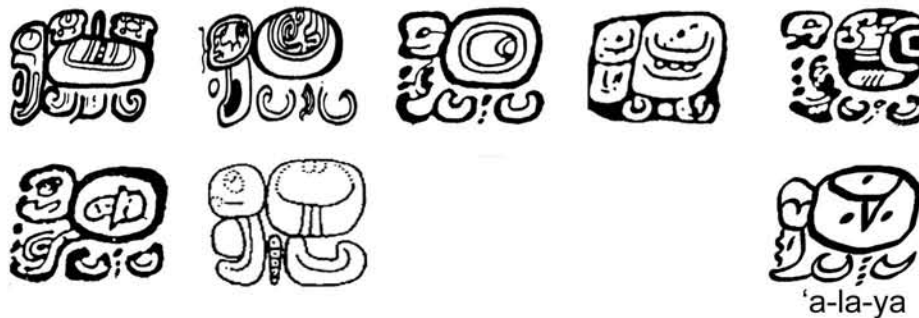
PSS - Presentation I

'a-LAY-ya

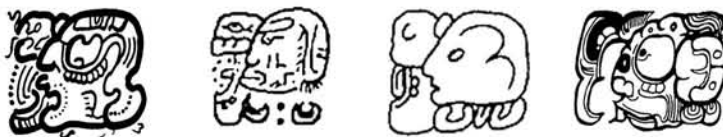
alay

this, this one, here

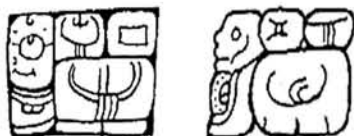
'a-LAY-ya



'a-LAY?-ya



'a-LAY-AJAW?
(Chochola pottery)



T'ABAY-yi

t'abay

to ascend, to dedicate



"God N"-yi



??-ya



K'AL-aj-ó

k'al

it was presented (flat-hand & allographs)

K'AL-ja



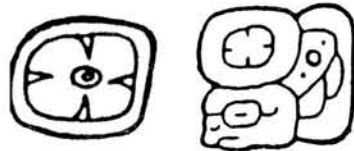
k'a-la-ja



KAN-?-K'UL?



K'IN-?-ja



?-CHAN?-ja



?-CHAN?-ja



pi-ku?-ja



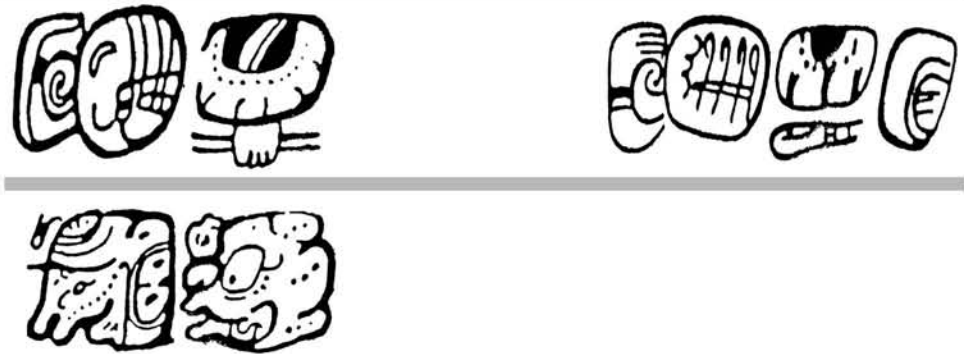
PSS - Surface Treatment I

yi-chi
yich
writing surface

yi-chi



yi-chi ba??-li



-chi



PSS - Surface Treatment II

'U TZ'IB'

"his writing" (+allographs & affixes)

'u tz'i-bi



'u-



tz'i-ba



-li
(u tz'ibil
"his written
object")



ba?-li

'u tz'i-bi-li



-NA-ja
(tz'ib or
tz'ibal)



'u-TZ'IB



YUXUL

his carving / scraping



yu-XUL?-[lu]



yu-XUL?-lu-yi

PSS - Contents

CYLINDERS & BOWLS

KAKAW
chocolate
(cacao)



ka-ka-wa-ja



ka-ka-wa-ja



KAKAW

TI YUTAL
fresh
(cacao)



ti-yu-ta-la

IXIM TE'EL
maize-tree-
like
(describes
cacao)



IXIM TE'-e-le



ta-IXIM TE'-le



ta-IXIM

TA TZIH
new, fresh,
raw (cacao)



ta-tzi



ta-tzi-le-TE'



ta-tzi-hi

'UL
corn gruel



'u-lu

SAK HA
white or
sacred
water



SAK HA

PLATES

'u we'ib
his food (tamale)



'u



WE'



'i



bi



'u



WE'



'i bi

sak chihil we'
for white venison
(deer) food



SAK-chi-hi-li



WE'

*waaj or
ohl*
maize dough
(tamale)



ta sak chil waaj
for white venison
tamales



ta



SAK-ki



chi



yi-li



WAAJ-ji

Glossary

This section has been modified from the Glossary presented by David Stuart, Stephen Houston and John Robertson in the Notebook for the XXIIIrd Maya Hieroglyphic Forum at Texas, Maya Workshop Foundation 1999. Literal translations of inscribed glyphs appear in **bold** type, with **BOLD CAPITAL** letters indicating word signs or logographs, and **lower-case** letters representing phonetic elements. Transliterations that reproduce actual Maya (or other foreign) words are printed in *italic*.

abbreviation Using part of a sign to signify the whole, as in variants of phonetic syllables; often taken from a facial element, such as the dotted eye of a macaw (read **mo**) or the spotted ear of a toad (**‘e**). See *pars pro toto*.

absolutive A set of pronouns (Set B) marking subject of intransitive verb and object of transitive verb.

absolutizer Suffix (**-aj**) that allows inalienable possessed nouns to appear without ergative pronoun.

abstractive Nouns of abstract quality derived from concrete nouns (**AJAW** = lord; **AJAW-il** = lordliness).

adjective An element qualifying nouns and revealing some special quality or property pertinent to them.

aesthetic manipulation Principle by which glyphic spellings accord with aesthetic concerns, including attention to symmetry; such spellings often deviate from standard reading order.

affix Glyph of approximately rectangular form, often attached to **main sign**.

agent The initiator of action in a transitive verb.

agentive Prefix or suffix attached to nouns that describe kinds of people or roles that people can occupy.

allograph A sign implying membership in a set of freely substitutable glyphs; this alternation suggests equivalence in sound or meaning.

animation (see **full figure**) The principle by which signs adopt physical features of animate beings, including faces, arms, legs and torsos.

anticipatory numbers A system of enumeration that specifies larger, bracketing intervals and then situates a number within those intervals; “52” is “12 within the third unit of 20 years,” or “1st 20 + 2nd 20 + 12 [implicitly couched in the 3rd 20]”.

anti-passive voice The absence of an object on a transitive verb. See **voice**.

argument Noun phrases of varying type; opposed to **predicate**.

aspect Verbal marker referring to the verbal action itself, according to whether an event is ongoing (incomplete) or achieved and finished (completive); marked either by inflectional particles or \emptyset .

assimilation Speech sound (phoneme) taking on part or all of the characteristics of another speech sound (usually a following sound): **ato:t** > **oto:t**. Here the **a-**, in anticipation of the following **-o-**, becomes an **o**; assimilation of sounds increases from early to later Classic Mayan.

bak'tuun Unit of 20 **k'atuun**, or a sum of 144,000 days; also known in literature as **pi** or **PIH**.

calendar round Cycle of just under 52 years in length; composed of the 260-day sacred calendar permutating with the 365-day “vague year” (so-called because it only approximates the solar year of 365.2422 days).

Classic Mayan The language recorded in inscriptions of the Classic Period; ancestral to Ch'olti' and its daughter language, Ch'orti'.

clitic A verbal unit that modifies virtually any part of speech, giving grammatical meaning. In the Ch'olan and Tzeltalan languages, *ix-* modifies nouns, adjectives and verbs and means “recent past.”

cognates Words (morphemes or even sounds) of separate languages that are related because they descend from a common, ancestral form. the words *q'i:N* (Jakaltek), *k'in* (Classic Mayan), *k'in* (Yukatek), and **q'i:j* (K'iche') are cognates because they all come from the same ancestral source, Common Mayan **q'i:N*. Cognates are often referred to as siblings, in the sense that siblings descend from a common source. See **reflex**.

Common Mayan The parent Mayan language as reconstructed by the **comparative historical method**.

comparative historical method The postulation of an ancestral form that allows for examples in all descendant language.

completive An aspectual reference to an achieved action, either recently, in the future, or in the past.

complex vowels Long vowel before a consonant, a vowel and a glottal stop before a consonant, or a vowel and *h* before a consonant. See **disharmony**.

compound The combination of several signs, often a grouping of **affixes** and a **main sign**; roughly corresponds to a **glyph block**.

conflation The combination of signs that share the same outline, but without any reduction in size of the constituent elements.

correlation Determining the correspondence between Maya and European calendars.

correlation constant The number added to a **Maya day number** to convert to a **Julian day number**; a crucial element of **correlation**.

decipherment The complex process by which scholars move from undeciphered script to a precise rendering of the text in their own language; an attempt to account for sign use.

decorum Extralinguistic influences on the selection, placement, and ranking of glyphic information; effects the display or reading of texts.

Dedicatory Formula A formulaic text with several constituent phrases; may specify the dedicant, owner or maker of object on which the Sequence appears. In relation to ceramic texts, the Dedicatory Formula is often referred to in the literature as the **Primary Standard Sequence**.

deictic Linguistic markers that take the act of speaking into account.

derived transitives Class of **transitive verbs** longer than consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) form: e.g., *patbu* = “shape.”

derivation The process by which words are formed from other words.

diacritic A mark that indicates a phonetic value different from that given the unmarked or otherwise marked sign; e.g., the cartouche encircling a sign used in the sacred calendar indicates a different phonetic value than the same sign without the cartouche.

dialect Regional patterns of speech.

diglossia Bilingualism based on marked distinctions between formal (or standard) and vernacular speech.

discourse analysis The study of language in use, usually in narrative strings; along with content, discourse expresses a sociolinguistic input of personal attitudes and social relations.

disharmony The presence of vocalic discordance in syllabic spellings; records vowel length or **complex vowels**.

distance number A verbal phrase denoting the time between two dates; distance numbers almost always reference dates in the sacred and solar calendars.

distributional analysis The comparison of sign use in closely similar sequences of glyphs; the means of discerning patterns of substitutions and possible **allographs**.

ditransitive Referring to a sentence with **three arguments**; in glyphs, the direct object is usually rendered as a possessed noun.

elision Derived from “elide,” meaning the loss of a phoneme.

Emblem Glyph A title used by the rulers of Classic Maya polities; translated as “Holy-X-Lord” with “X” often denoting a place or polity.

epigraphy Study of the script carved or incised into stone or some other durable material; for Mayanists, the general study of hieroglyphic texts, with an emphasis on monumental examples.

ergative Referring to the ERGATIVE pronouns (Set A); the subject of **transitive** verbs, as well as possessive pronouns.

ethics In epigraphy, the consideration and practice of responsibility to texts, their documentation, interpretation, and preservation; may also concern issues of intellectual property rights.

full-figure Referring to signs with full evidence of **animation**; in extreme form, full-figure glyphs embrace or envelop adjacent signs, thus blurring sign boundaries and reducing intelligibility to the reader.

future The time that is yet to come with reference to the here-and-now (see **tense**).

genre Pertaining to the classification of texts by form and content; ideally, classification reflects ancient groupings of information.

glottochronology Statistical means of dating the divergence of languages; examines shifts in the inventory of certain words and deduces the rates of change through comparison with better understood languages; thought to be unreliable by many linguists.

glottographic Pertaining to visible records of spoken language.

glyph The irreducible semantic or phonetic element of Maya script.

glyph block A roughly square unit of text containing either a **main sign** or a main sign with **affixes**; often the second element was created after the outlining or blocking of the overall text, sometimes accentuates emphasis and the “pacing” of text.

grapholect Regionally, temporally or functionally restricted variant of script (see **dialect**).

Gregorian calendar The calendar system currently used in the United States and Europe.

Named for Pope Gregory XIII who revised the **Julian calendar** in 1582 to correct errors in the sequence of leap years and in reckoning the date of Easter based on the lunar calendar.

hab' A unit of 360 days; also referred to using the term **tuun** in the **Initial Series** or **Distance Numbers**.

hapax legemonon A unique sign or spelling.

head variant Alternate zoomorphic or anthropomorphic way of writing numbers; unlike animated glyphs, head variants are graphically distinct from the more common signs used for numbers.

hieroglyph "Sacred carving," interchangeable with the term **glyph**.

high language A prestige language as opposed to the **vernacular** (see **diglossia**).

homeland The conjectured region where a language was first spoken; difficult to determine in the absence of coeval evidence.

homophone Sets of words with different meanings but the same or similar sound; **rebus** in script exists because of homophones.

ideographs Signs solely representing ideas; unusual in Maya script.

inchoative A class of intransitive verbs derived from adjectives or nouns.

incomplete Verbal aspect denoting ongoing events.

index A systematic catalog of glyphs and their variant forms.

infix A sign fitted within another.

infixation Like **conflation**, a combination of signs, but with one glyph reduced in size and fitted within another.

Initial Series A system of place notation to recording a long count date; tends to occur initially in glyphic texts, hence its name; often preceded by Initial Series Introductory Glyph of unknown reading.

inflection Denoting different grammatical relations through changes in a word.

instrumental suffix A particle enabling something to happen; attached to verbal nouns.

interpretive community People in habitual discourse over texts and their meanings; not restricted to literates or **reading community**, but inclusive of them. Discourse takes place orally and though script.

intransitive Verbs (**predicates**) having a single argument (see **proposition**), namely, the subject: e.g., “The sun rose.”

irrealis Verbal inflection describing something not known or not yet in existence; applicable to future tense.

Julian day number Astronomical series beginning on January 1, 4712 B.C., with year 0 inserted; relevant to the correlation of Maya dates. In the Julian calendar, the tropical year is approximated as $365\frac{1}{4}$ days = 365.25 days; this gives an error of 1 day in approximately 128 years.

k’atuun A unit of 20 **hab’** or 7,200 days; probably derived from the term for the bundling or wrapping of years (*k’al-tu:n*).

k’in A unit of one day.

literacy The process, sociolinguistically conditioned, by which scribes and sculptors produce script and readers elicit sound and meaning from signs.

local frame Subset of **site frame**, inclusive of one or more **reading frames**: e.g., texts on a single building, or on a row of stelae; intended by scribes to be understood collectively, if through disparate reading acts.

locative Referring to place or the place where something exists or took place.

logograph Glyph conveying a word or **morpheme**; a fundamental unit of Maya script.

long count Date recorded in place-notational system, chiefly with respect to the **bak’tuun** cycle that commenced in 3114 B.C.; several long counts refer to even greater cycles.

Lord of the Night Repeating cycle of nine glyphs; probable series of nine supernaturals resembling sequences of Aztec and Zapotec gods.

main sign A large glyph that may have attached **affixes**; this convention probably began when glyphs were coterminous with glyph blocks.

Maya day number The sum of days in a long count notation.

misspelling A scribal error, either intended or inadvertent.

mood A verbal marker signaling the speaker's involvement in a matter under discussion. Spanish, for example, uses the subjunctive mood: *¡Que venga Juan!* "Would that John come!" In Common Mayan, the marker for the optative (like subjunctive) mood was *-oq for intransitive verbs and *-Vl' for transitive verbs.

morpheme The minimally meaningful linguistic units of grammatical or lexical significance.

morphemic sign A glyphic sign that inverts CV syllables to yield VC suffixes; neither purely logographic nor syllabic, but a bridging class of sign. For example, **IB** from **bi**; **EY** from **ye**, **IL** from **li**; the use of morphemic signs in Maya writing is not universally accepted.

morphosyllabic A unit of script representing both words and syllables.

name-tag The glyphic specification of the dedicant, owner or maker of an object or monument.

narrative A story organized in careful, linear succession, inherently more formal and coherent than casual speech; possess particular aims, studied patterns of beginning and ending, close editing of content and self-conscious highlighting of certain people and events.

natural language The language spoken by native speakers, serving meaningful social functions.

nominalizer An affix that derives a verb into a noun.

numeral classifier An element immediately following numerals that qualifies the thing being counted; Mayan languages have both general forms and specific ones that vary according to the entity being enumerated; relatively few appear in Maya script.

orthography Rules of conventionalized spelling; inferred by epigraphers from empirical patterns in script.

parentage statement Alternative description of individual designating his or her condition of being the child or a particular man or woman.

parenthetical insertion An explanatory or additional phrase embedded within a continuous text; the phrases before and after are understood to bridge the insertion.

pars pro toto The partial standing for the whole; a term usually applied to iconography (symbolic imagery), but applicable glyphically to **abbreviations**.

passage The first-order division of **text** with temporal information, verbs and names; roughly equivalent to "paragraph" in that it contains constituent propositions, consisting in turn of constituent predicates and arguments.

passive voice When a marker on a transitive verb signals the absence of the agent, as Classic Mayan *mu(h)k-aj*, "it is buried." See **voice**.

patient The recipient of action from a transitive verb.

personification Another term for **animation**; can be incipient (the imposed outline of a human face) or full (attachment to a body).

phoneme A functionally meaningful sound in a particular language.

phonology Pertaining to functionally meaningful sounds of language and to its inventory of **phonemes**.

polyvalence The property by which a single sign can have several readings, either logographic or syllabic.

positional A class of adjective or verb encoding for placement in space.

postfix A sign to right or bottom of other signs (most frequently the **main sign**).

predicate Part of a sentence or clause that says something about the subject.

prefix Affixes in front of or above a main sign.

preposition A word relating one noun to another noun, to an adjective or verb.

Primary Standard Sequence A formulaic text with several constituent phrases; may specify the dedicant, owner or maker of object on which the Sequence appears. In recent years, the term **Dedicatory Formula** has become favored for this sequence.

progressive A construction indicating on-going action; documented in use as early as Common Mayan. Lowland Languages show the progressive as: Predicate (ERG-*Vin-el*] Subject, as in, *woli k-til-el* “I am coming” (Ch’ol).

proposition Complete sentence (second-order division of **text**), consisting of predicate and argument or arguments. In the proposition “Sandy smiled,” the predicate is “smiled” and the argument is “Sandy.” In the proposition “Sandy ordered lunch,” “ordered is the predicate, “Sandy” and “lunch” are the arguments. In Mayan, a single word, e.g., *winik*, can be either the predicate (“he is a man”) or the argument (*hul-i:y winik*, “the man arrived”) of a proposition.

proto-language/common language Reconstructions of an ancestral language from related, cognate languages. Ideally, Common Mayan and proto-Mayan form identical reconstructions, but with an analytic difference. “Common language” concerns the process of reconstruction and the derivation of that language into descendant tongues. “Proto-language” emphasizes the language in its temporal and cultural setting. A “proto-language,” for example, might yield words that allow speculations about the technology and environment available to the speakers of the language. The concept of “common language” stresses the flow of linguistic change, “proto-language” emphasizes the static points between such changes.

Proto-Mayan See **Common Maya**.

quotative statement Glyphic record of a speech act, marked by first- and second-person pronouns and followed by reference to that speech act and its participants.

reading The decipherment, sometimes tentative, of a particular sign, combination of signs or text.

reading community Readers in habitual contact with glyphs in a **site frame**. Properly comprises the literate only; **interpretive community** consists of readers and those in habitual discourse with them over the subject matter of glyphs.

reading frame Discrete but comprehensive statement in glyphs (see **text**); intended by scribes to be scanned at one time in a single act of reading. Some contexts, such as the Bonampak murals, contain many reading frames.

rebus Principle by which iconic representations of **homophones** alternate freely.

reflex A word descending from a common ancestor. Classic Mayan *k'in* is a reflex of Common Mayan **q'i:N*. Reflexes are like “children,” in the sense that both descend from a common source.

root The principal morpheme of a word (see **stem**); assigned to sub-categories based on derivational possibilities.

root transitive A class of transitive verbs taking the consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) form, as in *chuk*, “grab, take.” This class does not use the same markers the derived transitive.

rubbing The direct impression of pigment onto a surface covered with paper or other medium in order to highlight relevant areas.

script death Graphic analogue to language death; the sudden or gradual extinction of script through decreasing number of functions and users, incomplete acquisition across generations and lapses in uniform standards of scribal use.

script pragmatics An approach to script analysis that pays attention to context and manner of reading.

sculptor's signature The glyphic indication of the sculpture's authorship; in Mayan the signature begins with a possessed sign referring to carving.

seepage The transmission or influence of terms of grammatical particles from vernaculars into **high language**.

semasiographic Pertaining to the visible records of ideas without reference to language.

sign The irreducible element of script, synonymous with **glyph**.

sign shift or **sign corruption** The principle by which the iconic referents of a logograph or syllabic sign become less clear through time, eventually leading to iconic reinterpretation (and often misinterpretation) of the original sign; the process that characterizes the transition from Early Classic to Late Classic Periods.

signary The sum total of signs in a writing system; properly sub-divided by period and place of use.

single-argument predicate (SAP) A predicate taking only one argument (including intransitive verbs and transitive verbs that are in the passive or anti-passive voice).

site frame The sum total of glyphs in a **reading community**; consists of multiple **local frames**, only some of which were in imperishable form.

space filler A graphic element that fills the gaps around digits in numerical notations; uncommon in the Early Classic and Post-Classic Periods.

split-ergativity This concept depends on the distinction between completive and incompletive aspect. In the completive aspect, the ergative marks the subject of transitives and the absolutive marks the subject of intransitives and the object of transitives. In the incompletive, the ergative marks the subject of both transitives and intransitives, while the absolutive marks the object of transitives. Classic Mayan is not a language that uses split-ergativity.

stative Referring to sentences that denote the continuous, ongoing condition of being something, displaying a certain property or existing in some place or position.

stela An upright stone monolith set into the floor of a platform, plaza or courtyard.

stem A morpheme inflected with person markers or other particles.

substitution A pattern of alternation between glyphs; may indicate that the signs are **allographs**.

superfix An affix placed above the **main sign**.

superimposition The principle by which one sign is partly concealed (at least graphically) behind another, as though partially overlapping; the outlines of both constituent glyphs are at least partially preserved.

Supplementary Series Lunar and other information relating to a date; this series follows the **Initial Series**.

syllabary The sum total of syllables, presented by modern specialists within a grid composed of cross-cutting consonants and vowels; best sub-divided by period and place of use.

syllabic sign A glyph of Consonant-Vowel (CV) form that began as a CVC logograph ending in a weak vowel or aspirate; combined with other syllabic signs and/or used as **complement** without reference to original logographic value.

syncope The deletion of a vowel; as in Classic Mayan *chu[h]k-aj-i:y* “it was covered.”

synharmony Vowel harmony in syllabic spellings with CV + CV form; clue of variable reliability to vowels of undeciphered syllabic signs. See **disharmony**.

tense The verbal marking of time, specifically referencing the “now.” In languages with tense, what came before “now” is past tense (preterit). What is generally “now” is the present. Although Common Mayan only had grammatical aspect, they marked time with both particles and adverbials. For example, the particle **ix* = “recent past,” the adverbial **oN-e:r* = “long ago in the past.” When attached to numbers, this same *-e:r* suffix meant “two days ago,” “three days ago” and so on; e.g., **kab-ej-e:r* = “two days ago.”

text The sum total of glyphs in a **reading frame**; includes one or more **passages**.

text hierarchy The framework for understanding the context of glyphic reading: consists, in order, of **site frame**, **local frame**, **reading frame** or **text**, **passage**, **proposition**, **predicates** and **arguments**.

tonalpohualli The term used by the Aztecs for the 260-day sacred calendar.

toponym A place name; often a particular locus within a site or polity.

transcription A sign-by-sign rendering of logographic and syllabic elements; the first order scanning of text that needs **transliteration** to achieve intelligibility.

transitive Verbs having two **arguments**, an agent and a direct object (see **proposition**); e.g., “Sandy raised her hand.”

translation The third-order rendering of **transliteration** into the language of the reader; unnecessary to native Maya speakers unless **diglossia** present.

transliteration The morphemic rendering of **transcription**; second-order interpretation of signs by reader.

tuun A term for “stone.”

under-spelling (also **under-representation**) The incomplete representation of expected glyphic elements; presumed to result from scribal choice.

verb The predicate of a **proposition**.

vigesimal To reckon numbers by twenties; a base-20 system of numerical notation.

voice A verbal marker that signals the suppression of one of the two arguments of a transitive verb. The two arguments are the **agent** and the **patient**. In the sentence, “Sandy hit Lynn,” “Sandy” is the patient and “Lynn” is the agent. There are two basic kinds of voice in Common Mayan: passive and anti-passive. Passive voice markers effect the suppression of the agent, while anti-passive markers suppress the patient. Thus, in passive voice “Lynn was hit” (by “Sandy”). Using the anti-passive = “Sandy hits,” but without saying who it is that Sandy hits. Both occur in Classic Mayan, but passive voice is more commonly used.

vowel harmony A suffix using the same vowel as the preceding sign. The suffix takes on all or some of the characteristics of the root vowel, e.g., *-Vil*, for positionals can be realized as *-al*, *-el*, *-il*, *-ol*, *-ul*, depending on the preceding root vowel, e.g., *chum-ul* = “He is sitting.”

Year Bearer First day of the new year or the last day of the old; shifted during the use span of Maya script.

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