

Breaking the Maya Code

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The author of *The Maya and Mexico* interweaves the story of the struggle to decipher the complex hieroglyphic inscriptions of the Maya with a close-up look at what is known about the culture of the ancient Maya civilization. 12,000 first printing.

Michael D. Coe is Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at Yale University. His books include *The Maya*, *Mexico*, *Breaking the Maya Code*, *Angkor and the Khmer Civilization*, and *Reading the Maya Glyphs*. He lives in New Haven, Connecticut. The decipherment of the Maya script was, Coe states, "one of the most exciting intellectual adventures of our age, on a par with the exploration of space and the discovery of the genetic code." He presents the story eloquently and in detail, with many illustrations of the mysterious Maya inscriptions and the people who tried to decipher them. Most of the credit, he says, goes to the late Yuri V. Knorosov of the Russian Institute of Ethnography, but many others participated. They did not always agree, and some of them went up blind alleys. Coe--emeritus professor of anthropology at Yale University--vividly describes the battles, missteps and successes. What is now established, he writes, is that "the Maya writing system is a mix of logograms and syllabic signs; with the latter, they could and often did write words purely phonetically."

Coe concludes with a swipe at "dirt archaeologists" who believe the decipherment of Maya writing "is not worthy of notice." According to them, he asserts, "the Maya inscriptions are 'epiphenomenal,' a ten-penny word meaning that Maya writing is only of marginal application since it is secondary to those more primary institutions--economy and society--so well studied by the dirt archaeologists." Coe sees that attitude as "sour grapes" and ascribes it to "the inability or unwillingness of anthropologically trained archaeologists to admit that they are dealing with the remains of real people, who once lived and spoke."

Other Books

The Maya World. *The Maya World* brings together over 60 authors, representing the fields of archaeology, art history, epigraphy, geography, and ethnography, who explore cutting-edge research on every major facet of the ancient Maya and all sub-regions within the Maya world. The Maya world, which covers Guatemala, Belize, and parts of Mexico, Honduras, and El Salvador, contains over a hundred ancient sites that are open to tourism, eight of which are UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and many thousands more that have been dug or await investigation. In addition to captivating the lay public, the ancient Maya have attracted scores of major interdisciplinary research expeditions and hundreds of smaller projects going back to the 19th century, making them one of the best-known ancient cultures. *The Maya World* explores their renowned writing system, towering stone pyramids, exquisitely painted murals, and elaborate funerary tombs as well as their creative agricultural strategies, complex social, economic, and political relationships, widespread interactions with other societies, and remarkable cultural resilience in the face of historical ruptures. This is an invaluable reference volume for scholars of the ancient Maya, including archaeologists, historians, and anthropologists.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ . Boot, Erik 2003 *The Human Hand in Classic Maya Hieroglyphic Writing* Mesoweb. Mesoweb. ... Boot, Erik 2010 *Loanwords, "Foreign Words," and Foreign Signs in Maya Writing*. ... Coe, Michael D. 2012 *Breaking the Maya Code*. Third edition."