

ART AND WRITING IN  
THE MAYA CITIES,  
A.D. 600–800

*Art and Writing in the Maya Cities, A.D. 600–800*, examines an important aspect of the visual cultures of the ancient Maya in southern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, and Honduras. During a critical period of cultural evolution, artistic production changed significantly, as calligraphy became an increasingly important formal element in Maya aesthetics and was used extensively in monumental building, sculptural programs, and small-scale utilitarian objects. Adam Herring's study analyzes artworks, visual programs, and cultural sites of memory, providing an anthropologically informed description of ancient Maya culture, vision, and artistic practice. An inquiry into the contexts and perceptions of the ancient Maya city, his book melds epigraphic and iconographic methodologies with the critical tradition of art-historical interpretation.

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ART AND WRITING IN  
THE MAYA CITIES,  
A.D. 600–800

*A Poetics of Line*

ADAM HERRING

*Southern Methodist University*



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
 978-0-521-84246-4 — Art and Writing in the Maya Cities, AD 600–800  
 Adam Herring  
 Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom  
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
 314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi - 110025, India  
 79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

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[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521842464](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521842464)

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First published 2005

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data*

Herring, Adam, 1967–

Art and writing in the Maya cities, A.D. 600–800 : a poetics of line / Adam Herring

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-521-84246-8 (hardback)

1. Maya art. 2. Mayas – Antiquities. 3. Maya language – Writing. 4. Inscriptions, Mayan.  
 5. Manuscripts, Maya. 6. Mexico – Antiquities. 7. Central America – Antiquities. I. Title.

FI434.2.A7H47 2005

709'.7281'09021 – dc22

2004061776

ISBN 978-0-521-84246-4 Hardback

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## A NOTE ON THE ORTHOGRAPHY

In transcribing words and expressions from the various Mayan languages, I have chosen to retain the orthography of the documentary source from which the individual citation was drawn. Though this decision results in the juxtaposition of disparate orthographic conventions and spellings, it is the case that no satisfactory comprehensive orthographic system yet exists, and new, intelligently polemical orthographies continue to emerge from the vital scholarship of Mayan linguistics. The choice to retain the orthography of the secondary source from which I draw the citation may at least impart some sense of the diversity that obtains among the Mayan languages themselves. For the transcription of Classic Mayan expressions emerging from epigraphic readings, I adhere to the style guide presented in George Stuart, “Special Supplement: A Guide to the Style and Content of the Series,” *Research Reports on Ancient Maya Writing* 15 (Washington, D.C.: Center for Maya Research, 1987). The decipherment of the Maya hieroglyphic writing system remains incomplete, and spellings – particularly of long vowels and certain consonants – will certainly change; I have chosen simplicity over linguistic transparency, and generally follow the spelling employed in the most recent instance of careful epigraphic scholarship widely available to a public readership, Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube’s *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000). (My spelling renders the postalveolar affricates **ts/ts’**, rather than **tz/tz’**: hence, *ts’ib’*.) Maya Long Counts and Calendar Round dates are rendered according to their Julian equivalents.

This study draws from “Maya” sources widely separated by time, region, and ethnicity; notwithstanding, I do not intend to posit or construct the notion of the Maya as a monolithic cultural entity undivided by linguistic, ethnic, and social diversity and outside the historical process. The inevitable leveling of such differences that comes with this choice represents an artificiality born of the relatively primitive state of inquiry into Maya cultural history. Rather than turn away source material that might aid in the

project to restore the Mayas' long and diverse cultural history to modern awareness and continued inquiry, I have chosen to be judiciously inclusive of a wide variety of sources. It is my hope that prudent employment of ethnographic and paleographic sources in the interpretation of ancient material will yield a synoptic, rather than ahistorical, understanding of the larger Maya tradition.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to a number of institutions for assistance in the writing of this book. A Jacob K. Javits Fellowship, as well as grants and fellowships from the Yale University History of Art Department, the Albers Fund of Yale University, and Dumbarton Oaks, supported my graduate education and the writing of my dissertation. A Research Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities enabled me to bring the project to completion in 2003–4. I also wish to thank the Division of Art History, the Meadows School of the Arts, the Honors Program, and the University Research Council, all of Southern Methodist University, for their generous subvention of my research, writing, and publication.

I am also grateful for the support of friends, colleagues, teachers, and students. At Yale, my dissertation adviser, Mary Miller, gave generously of her deep understanding of the ancient Maya and of the practice of the history of art. In his office over High Street, George Kubler was a fount of knowledge and inspiration. David Stuart kindly allowed me to sit in on his classes on Mesoamerican religion and writing systems at Harvard's Peabody Museum in 1995, and he was generous with his insights both in and outside the lecture hall. At Dumbarton Oaks, Ricardo Agurcia Fasquelle, Simon Martin, and Dorie Reents-Budet offered spirited company and absorbing conversation. I also wish to give special thanks to Jeffrey Quilter, Director of Pre-Columbian Studies at Dumbarton Oaks; his insightful commentary had a profound effect on my research. All along, David Stuart, Stephen D. Houston, Karl Taube, Barbara Fash, Bill Fash, Andrea Stone, Jennifer Ahlfeldt, Allan Maca, Prajna Desai, Chelsea Dacus, and Jorge Ramos all generously shared their insights with me. Thanks also to my colleagues in the Division of Art History, Southern Methodist University, particularly Randall Griffin, who read and commented on various drafts of the study, and David Freidel, who was a constant source of inspiration as a scholar, teacher, and colleague. Professor James Lloyd of the University of Florida and Doctora Cleide Costa of the Museu Zoologia, Universidade de São Paulo, shared with me

their expertise concerning *Deilelater*. I also thank the staffs and directorships of the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia, the Asociación Copán, and the Copán Maya Foundation. Good friends provided criticism and encouragement over the long span of the project: Derick Dreher, Chris Gales, Regan Huff, Giles R. M. Knox, Nicholas Kouchoukos, Robert Maxwell, Jordana Mendelson, and Roger Rothman.

For their assistance in gathering illustrations, I thank Ian Graham and David Stuart of the Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Writing, Peabody Museum, Harvard University; Stephen D. Houston, Zac Nelson, and allied members of the Proyecto Arqueológico Piedras Negras; Arthur Demarest, Federico Fahsen, Sarah Jackson, and the Proyecto Arqueológico Cancuén; Gregory Finnegan of the Tozzer Library, Harvard University; Sharon Aponte Misdea of the Tikal Archive Project, and archivist Alessandro Pezzati, both of the University of Pennsylvania Museum; Javier Urcid; Russell Martin of the DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University; the conservation staff of the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth; Chip Clark; Joe Tagliarini; Ashley Kistler; and Barbara Kerr and Justin Kerr. At Cambridge University Press, I am grateful for Beatrice Rehl's early interest in the project, as well as for the insightful commentary of two anonymous readers. Under Michael Gnat's keen eye, the project was seen to conclusion.

My interest in the Maya came about in no small measure through the friendship and hospitality of the Maafs family of Mexico City; in Honduras, the Stache family; and the McCrossen family of New Mexico. I owe more than I know to my grandparents, my parents, and to my brother, Andrew Herring, for their love and support through the years. This book could not have been written without Alexis McCrossen and Ann Macon Herring, and for them I am most grateful of all.