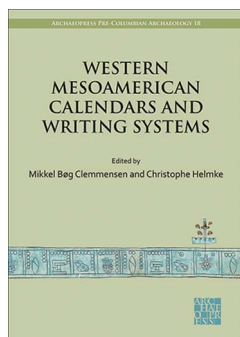


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MIKKEL BØG CLEMMENSEN & CHRISTOPHE HELMKE (ed.). 2023. *Western Mesoamerican calendars and writing systems. Proceedings of the Copenhagen Roundtable* (Archaeopress Pre-Columbian Archaeology 18). Oxford: Archaeopress; 978-1-80327-485-0 paperback £38 Open Access.



The previously little-known writing systems of western Mexico have attracted increased research interest during the last decade. The most important reason for this has been a series of publications by the late Alfonso Lacadena (Lacadena 2008), Marc Zender (Zender 2008), Gordon Whittaker (Whittaker 2009) and others, which have led to a new understanding of Aztec writing as a logosyllabic writing system, not unlike other better-understood Mesoamerican scripts. The book reviewed here publishes the proceedings of a conference on writing systems in western Mesoamerica and contains seven chapters covering various aspects of writing from the Classic to the Colonial periods (250–1600 AD). The first three chapters provide overviews of specific writing traditions in western Mesoamerica. The last four chapters discuss decipherments, documents or aspects of hybrid writing in the context of the Colonial period transformation.

As pointed out in the first chapter by Davide Domenici, the writing system of Teotihuacan was not recognised as true writing for a long time. Recent research now proves that it shares many similarities with Postclassic Nawatl writing. Among the writing systems in south-western Mexico is the Late Classic N̄uiñe script. Ángel Iván Rivera reviews the current state of research of this writing system, known mainly from funerary contexts, panels representing conquests and monuments commemorating the founding of communities. The third chapter, by Christophe Helmke and Jesper Nielsen, introduces the Epiclassic script of central Mexico. This little-known writing system bridges the time between the Teotihuacan and Nawatl hieroglyphic writing in the Late Postclassic. So far, only 71 Epiclassic texts have been found on different media, yet a corpus of 150 signs can be identified, a number appropriate for a logosyllabic writing system. The decipherment of some toponyms and titles seems to confirm this interpretation. For all of the three writing systems presented, the underlying languages are not clearly identified, and phonetic readings are still problematic.

The following four chapters deal with different aspects of western Mesoamerican scripts. Albert Davletshin identifies a new category of signs in Nawatl writing which he calls ‘notational signs’, discussing a sign showing a woven throne for the title *tlatoani*, ‘king, ruler’. In the next chapter, Margarita Cossich Vielman compares two colonial documents which describe the conquest of Guatemala from an indigenous perspective. In both sources, the toponyms for the conquered places are written with Aztec hieroglyphs but show different writing conventions. The last two chapters deal with hybrid colonial-period calendars from central Mexico. Mikkel Bøg Clemmensen examines the origin of calendar wheels in colonial-period manuscripts and argues convincingly that they are based on pre-Hispanic,

rather than European, models. The final chapter of the book is by the late Ana Díaz Álvarez. She argues that the calendar year based on 18 twenty-day periods and five transitional days was only created in response to the Julian calendar during the Colonial period, identifying the 260-day Tonalpohualli as the only authentic pre-Hispanic calendar of central Mexico.

Taken as a whole, the seven chapters of the book provide an excellent overview of the functioning and diversity of writing systems in western Mesoamerica. Conceptually, however, the volume would have gained a lot if there had been a summary chapter that elaborated on the commonalities and differences among these scripts. The title of the book contains the term 'western Mesoamerica' without reflecting upon the usefulness of this concept; it seems to be based on an implicit distinction from 'eastern Mesoamerica' that is also articulated in the structure of the writing systems. The writing systems of eastern Mesoamerica, especially the well-known Maya script, but also the Isthmus script and the early scripts of the Highlands of Guatemala, contain a higher proportion of phonograms. They also display linear texts, which are clearly distinguished spatially and visually from the images that often accompany them.

The writing systems of western Mesoamerica, on the other hand, make use primarily of logograms. Phonograms, for example, have not yet been proven to exist in Teotihuacan writing, complicating the identification of the underlying language(s). Another common feature of these scripts, probably related to the sparse use of phonograms or syllabic signs, is the reduced number of verbal expressions. Hieroglyphs are mostly used to write titles, names, dates and toponyms and thus provide the temporal and spatial framework for event sequences depicted in images. Karl Taube has therefore labelled Teotihuacan writing as an 'emblematic script' (Taube 2000). Hieroglyphs often stand alone and tag a place or an individual; only in very few cases can linear texts be discerned in the writing systems described, where the signs no longer stand in a natural environment of meaning and space but are subjected to the syntax of language. In their chapter on Epiclassic writing, however, Helmke and Nielsen identify a few linear sequences of glyphs and observe a basic word order, suggesting that the clauses were verb initial as seen in Nawatl and Otomian languages.

A summary chapter might also have considered the development of western Mesoamerican writing systems and their contacts to other script traditions. Even though some of the contributions implicitly assume that the Epiclassic and Nawatl writing systems were inspired by Teotihuacan, the position of Nũñe writing (and other scripts in Oaxaca) in relation to Teotihuacan is much less clear. Finally, another site for future research is the exchange between the scripts of western and eastern Mesoamerica, evident in Chichen Itza, but also in the Teotihuacan-style incense burners from El Chato, Guatemala, and the writing system of the Cotzumalhuapa culture.

The present volume cannot address all of these issues, but it does make a first break toward a better understanding of these structurally similar writing systems. The scripts of western Mesoamerica are of great importance for the study of writing systems in general, precisely because of their distinctive interplay between script and image, lack of linearity, and flexibility in the arrangement of hieroglyphic signs. In this respect, the volume is also highly recommended reading for scholars concerned with the evolution and structure of writing systems from a theoretical and comparative perspective.

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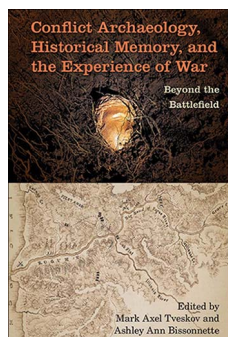
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MARK AXEL TVESKOV & ASHLEY ANN BISSONNETTE (ed.). 2023. *Conflict archaeology, historical memory, and the experience of war: beyond the battlefield*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida; 978-0-8130-6956-2 hardback \$90.



The reverberations of history in people’s lifeways and thoughts and its particular representations have long been addressed by the social/human sciences. As early as the mid-twentieth century, Edward Evans-Pritchard stressed the strong links between historical and anthropological perspectives and their potential for understanding society’s past and present (Evans-Pritchard 1950). Historical memory is now acknowledged as a dynamic and multi-layered entity tied to present conflict arenas. The book *Conflict archaeology, historical memory, and the experience of war* is a ground-breaking collective contribution that critically explores how memory is constructed and reconstructed through narratives of the past, which are disputed across asymmetric relationships and often at different scales.

The book’s twelve chapters address this complex phenomenon based on the archaeological research of conflicts from the sixteenth to twentieth centuries, with a focus on violent confrontations between European (mostly English, Spanish and French) countries and Indigenous nations in North America. In particular, this research on colonial conflicts describes the lasting impact of this litany of violence upon Indigenous and non-Native communities (e.g. African American settlers). The emphasis lies on how this is then reproduced nowadays in discourses, mythologising the events and using other powerful symbolic meanings which preclude those long-established neglected or marginalised people from reconciling themselves with their past. The authors here show how archaeology can contribute to a better and clearer understanding of these experiences of conflict and thereby give voice to these largely silenced descendant communities.

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