



# Glyph Dwellers

Report 38

May 2016

## A New Drawing of the Isthmian Inscription on the Feldspar Mask Published by Houston and Coe

Martha J. Macri

Professor Emerita,  
Department of Native American Studies, University of California, Davis

In 2003 Stephen Houston and Michael Coe published photographs and a drawing of an undeciphered inscription on the back of a carved feldspar mask (Houston and Coe 2003). Subsequently Coe provided me with a full set of photographs that he had taken of the mask. The additional images allowed me to produce a drawing of the text that did not show the distortions present in the published drawing by Houston. Although a more thorough discussion of the text will be included in a detailed paper on the Isthmian script currently in preparation, I am offering the drawing here to make it available for study (**Fig. 1**).

The column order of the Mask is a bit complex. Based on sign orientation, columns A and B face left, C and D face right, and E and F face left. As noted by Houston and Coe, a pattern of five signs in column E is repeated from the bottom of D to the top of E showing that C is read after D. Another piece of evidence for reading order can be seen in the oversize signs in column A, suggesting an effort to fill space at the end of a text. Crowding of signs sometimes occurs at the ends texts, but here there is no crowding, and the signs in columns A and B, although the same width as signs in the rest of the text, are taller. Since the same sign occurs at the top of three columns (A, D, and E) it would seem logical that A plus B constitute one segment, and C plus D and E plus F constitute two other segments. Likely reading orders include A and B together, read either before or after D-C-E-F (A, B, D, C, E, F or D, C, E, F, A, B).

The total number of signs is about 87 (depending on how one divides joined signs), 54 unique signs. Only 13 signs are not known from either the Tuxtla Statuette or the La Mojarra Stela, thus not included in the

catalog by Macri and Stark (1993)—a smaller number than the 25 previously unknown signs estimated by Houston and Coe.

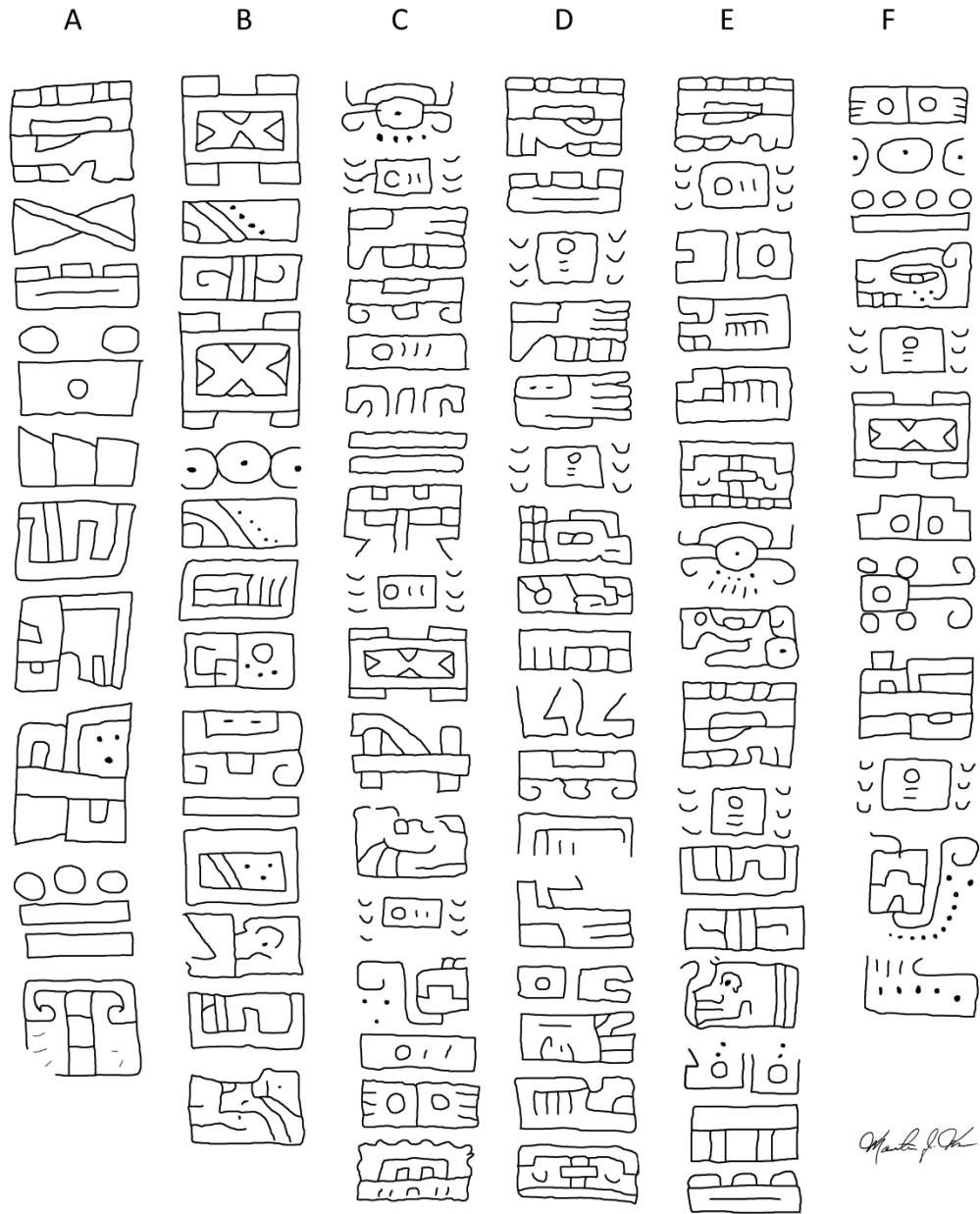


Fig. 1. Isthmian text incised on the back of a feldspar mask (Houston and Coe 2003). Drawing by Martha J. Macri.



**Acknowledgment:** I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Michael Coe for sharing with me his photographs of the mask.

## References

Houston, Stephen D., and Michael D. Coe

2003 Has Isthmian Writing Been Deciphered? *Mexicon* 25: 151–161.

Macri, Martha J., and Laura Stark

1993 *A Sign Catalog of the La Mojarra Script*, vol. 5. San Francisco: Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute.



Glyph Dwellers is an occasional publication of the Maya Hieroglyphic Database Project at California State University, Chico, California. Its purpose is to make available recent discoveries about ancient Maya culture, history, iconography, and Mayan historical linguistics deriving from the project.

Funding for the Maya Hieroglyphic Database Project is provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, grants #RT21365-92, RT21608-94, PA22844-96, the National Science Foundation, grants #SBR9710961 and IBSS1328928, the Department of Native American Studies, University of California, Davis, and the Department of Art and Art History, California State University, Chico.

(c) 2016 Matthew G. Looper. All rights reserved. Written material and artwork appearing in these reports may not be republished or duplicated for profit. Citation of more than one paragraph requires written permission of the publisher. No copies of this work may be distributed electronically, in whole or in part, without express written permission from the publisher.

ISSN 1097-3737