



Glyph Dwellers

Report 51

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A Sign Catalog of the Isthmian Script

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It has been 110 years since the publication of the inscription on a six-inch jade figurine, the Tuxtla Statuette, found in a field in San Andrés, Tuxtla, Veracruz (Holmes 1907; Holmes 1916), and 30 years since the six-foot La Mojarra Stela was pulled out of the Acula River in the municipio of Alvarado, Veracruz (Winfield Capitaine 1988). Since that time the script has seen a somewhat overstated claim of decipherment (Justeson and Kaufman 1993), and the discovery of an extended text on the back of a feldspar mask resulting in a challenge to that decipherment (Houston and Coe 2003).

E. Logan Wagner's photographs of the La Mojarra inscription were shown at the Maya Meetings at the University of Texas at Austin in March of 1987 to an amazed audience—this author included. Immediately upon the publication of the monument by George Stuart and Winfield Capitaine (1988), Laura Stark and I began analysis of the two texts and began to put together a sign list. One of the first tasks necessary for decipherment is to establish the list of signs, also called *graphemes*, which represent the minimal meaningful graphic elements of the script. This involves determining the number of occurrences of a grapheme, identifying the variants of a single sign, and distinguishing between compound graphemes (signs composed of two or more elements) and compound signs (sign groups composed of two or more graphemes). Since the meanings of the signs are unknown, they must be named or numbered so that they can be referred to in a uniform manner by scholars.

We distributed a preliminary sign list to participating scholars prior to the La Mojarra Stela Conference sponsored by the Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute and the de Young Museum in San Francisco, in October of 1990. The first published version was a working paper (Macri and Stark 1991) modified to include changes suggested by a number of the participants. A sign list with a catalog of all known signs arranged by number was published as a monograph by the Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute (Macri and Stark 1993). The numbers 1-19 are reserved for bar-and-dot numbers. The rest of the ordering should be considered arbitrary, though we made an effort to group some similar signs together. The MS



prefixed to catalog numbers (for Macri-Stark) is maintained in this publication despite the fact that Laura Stark, now professor of Ethnology at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, declined co-authorship of the updated materials.

This catalog includes signs from texts based on the following criteria: the texts have a large number of signs in common; the texts are formatted in single columns; and the texts are clear enough to be used with confidence. La Mojarra Stela 1 is the most extensive, followed by the Feldspar Mask, and the Tuxtla Statuette. Only clearly recognizable signs from the Ceramic Mask (Méluzin 1995) and the Chiapa de Corzo Sherd (Lee 1969) are included. That is, no "new" signs from these texts have been added to the catalog. There are, of course, a number of other inscriptions on monuments and jade celts that are relevant to understanding the Isthmian script, but they either represent a separate script or are too brief or too eroded to be included with confidence. Monuments with a single Isthmian sign or with long counts and day signs in Isthmian style, but with no other legible texts, are not included in this study.

When several new signs came to light with the publication of the Feldspar Mask, it became necessary to offer an updated version of the earlier catalog. To avoid any confusion, since the numbers for signs in our original list have been used in at least three significant publications (Houston and Coe 2003; Justeson and Kaufman 1993; Mora-Marin 2010), none of the original numbers have been changed. Nineteen new signs have been added to the end of the sign list, beginning with the number MS201. Unrecognizable (eroded or partial) signs are not included in the sign list proper, but are referred to by a decimal beginning with .01.

One change to the original catalog that does not require new numbering is that because the sky-earth configuration represents a unique meaning (word or syllable) separate from either of the signs alone, an earth sign is now shown as part of MS36. When the catalog was first created, the authors were extremely conservative about grouping signs together with the consequence that several similar signs appear simply to be variants of each other. The numbering has not been changed, but at this point in time, the following sets may well represent variants single signs: 26, 27; 34, 35; 40, 41; 53, 54, 55; 57, 58; 85, 86; 87, 88; 107, 108; 127, 128; 142, 143; 174, 175, 176. Undoubtedly some of the signs beginning with 201 and some of the eroded signs may in the future be identified as variants of other known signs.

One of the characteristics of the Isthmian script is that it is written in single columns, with the result that within a text all the signs tend to be of the same width, but of varying height. For this project all of the signs have been redrawn by the author 1.45" wide, up to 2" high, on a canvas of 2" x 2" at 600 dpi with a pen size of about 21 pixels. A few of the tallest signs have required reduction of width to less than 1.45". When multiple drawings of a text are available, the variations tend to be insignificant. A few signs have been modified from Stuart's drawing of the La Mojarra: in five examples of MS24 the central circle is changed to a scroll; lines are added to the top of scrolls at LMP19a and the center scroll at LMP14; the "mouth" of LMQ42 has been rounded; central elements of LMC5 and LMN27 are both modified slightly. Guide lines that appear along the back side of the columns were deleted. None of these changes appear to be important.

The drawings used in this publication are based on examination by this author of the Tuxtla Statuette and La Mojarra Stela 1 and on photographs, rubbings, and drawings from the following published and unpublished sources:

Chiapa de Corzo Sherd (Justeson and Kaufman 2008; Lee 1969; Winfield Capitaine 1988)



Ceramic Mask, also called the ceramic O'Boyle Mask (Méluzin 1995), the clay O'Boyle "mask" (Justeson and Kaufman 2008; Pérez de Lara and Justeson 2006), and a clay Epi-Olmec Monkey Skull (Kerr 2010)

Feldspar Mask, also called the Teo Mask (Houston and Coe 2003), from photographs by Michael Coe (Macri 2016)

La Mojarra Stela 1, front, from drawings by George Stuart; photographs of a rubbing by Merle Greene Robertson (Robertson 1995); full size photographic negatives by George Stuart of John M. Keshishian's rubbing (Keshishian 1988); Pérez de Lara and Justeson's (2006) high resolution photographs

La Mojarra Stela 1, side, column V drawn by John Justeson (Justeson and Kaufman 1997)

Tuxtla Statuette (Covarrubias 1946; Holmes 1907; Holmes 1916; Houston 2004; Winfield Capitaine 1988)

The reading order of all known texts is in single columns, top to bottom, and usually from left to right. On two monuments, however, the reading order of some columns is right to left: the La Mojarra text is read from the center columns with long count dates to the outer edges (A-L), and the Feldspar Mask has two columns (D-C) that are read right to left (see Macri 2016). In both cases, not only is the reading order changed, but the signs themselves are reversed along the vertical axis. This reversal is not apparent in symmetrical abstract signs, but can be seen in asymmetrical signs including faces. That right to left reflects an unusual order can be seen in inconsistencies in sign reversal. Minor "errors" occur on the La Mojarra stela: the direction of the diagonal line in MS37 on LMB8, as well as with that element (MS37) in MS179 on LMF5. MS75 at LMD1b is not reversed as would be expected. Orientation of the signs does not appear to be important other than to reflect the reading order. The inconsistencies in the reversals are significant only in that they demonstrate that left to right is the customary order and right to left is the less common. In this sign list and catalog all examples are shown oriented as they are in the text.

Abbreviations

CD	Chiapa de Corzo Sherd
CM	Ceramic Mask
FM	Feldspar Mask
LM	La Mojarra Stela 1
TS	Tuxtla Statuette



Acknowledgements: The original sign list and catalog were truly joint efforts between this author and Laura Stark. I would like to thank her sincerely for our collaboration. Debts of gratitude are also due to a number of scholars supportive of our efforts: George Stuart, Merle Greene Robertson, Sylvia Méluzin, and more recently, Michael Coe and Steve Houston for photographs of the Feldspar Mask. Thanks also to John Justeson and Terrence Kaufman who played an important role in publicizing the extraordinary text on La Mojarra Stela 1. Support for the original investigation came from a University of California President's Fellowship, a grant from the Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute in San Francisco, and the de Young Museum of San Francisco.

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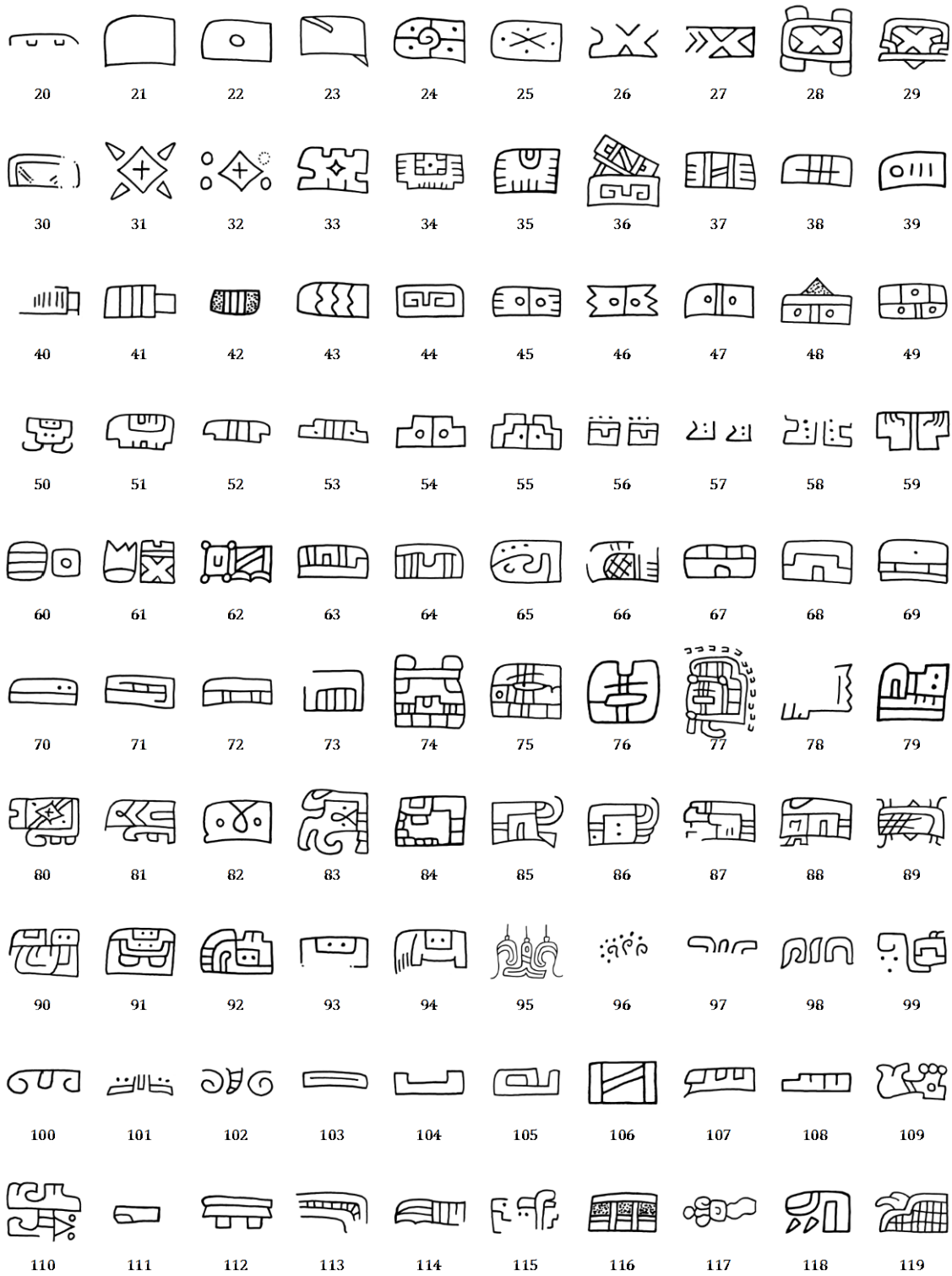
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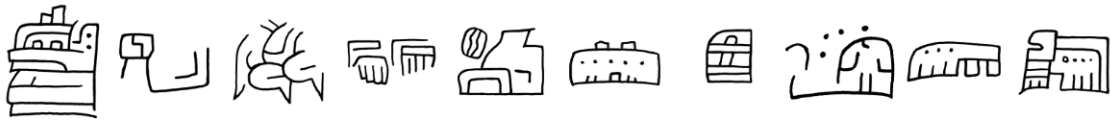


A Sign List of the Isthmian Script





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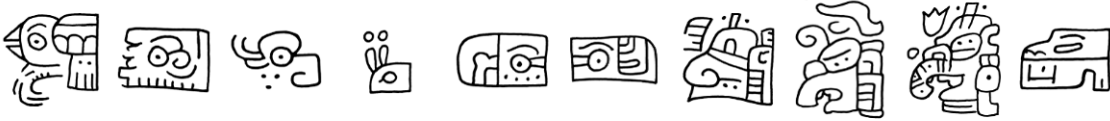
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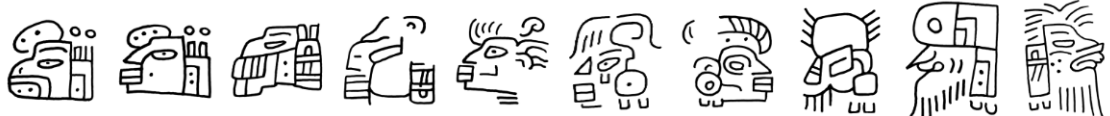
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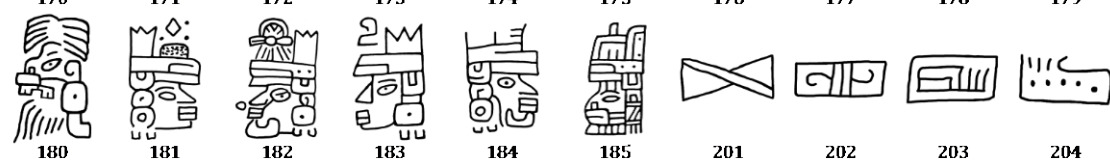
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A Catalog of Signs Grouped by Number

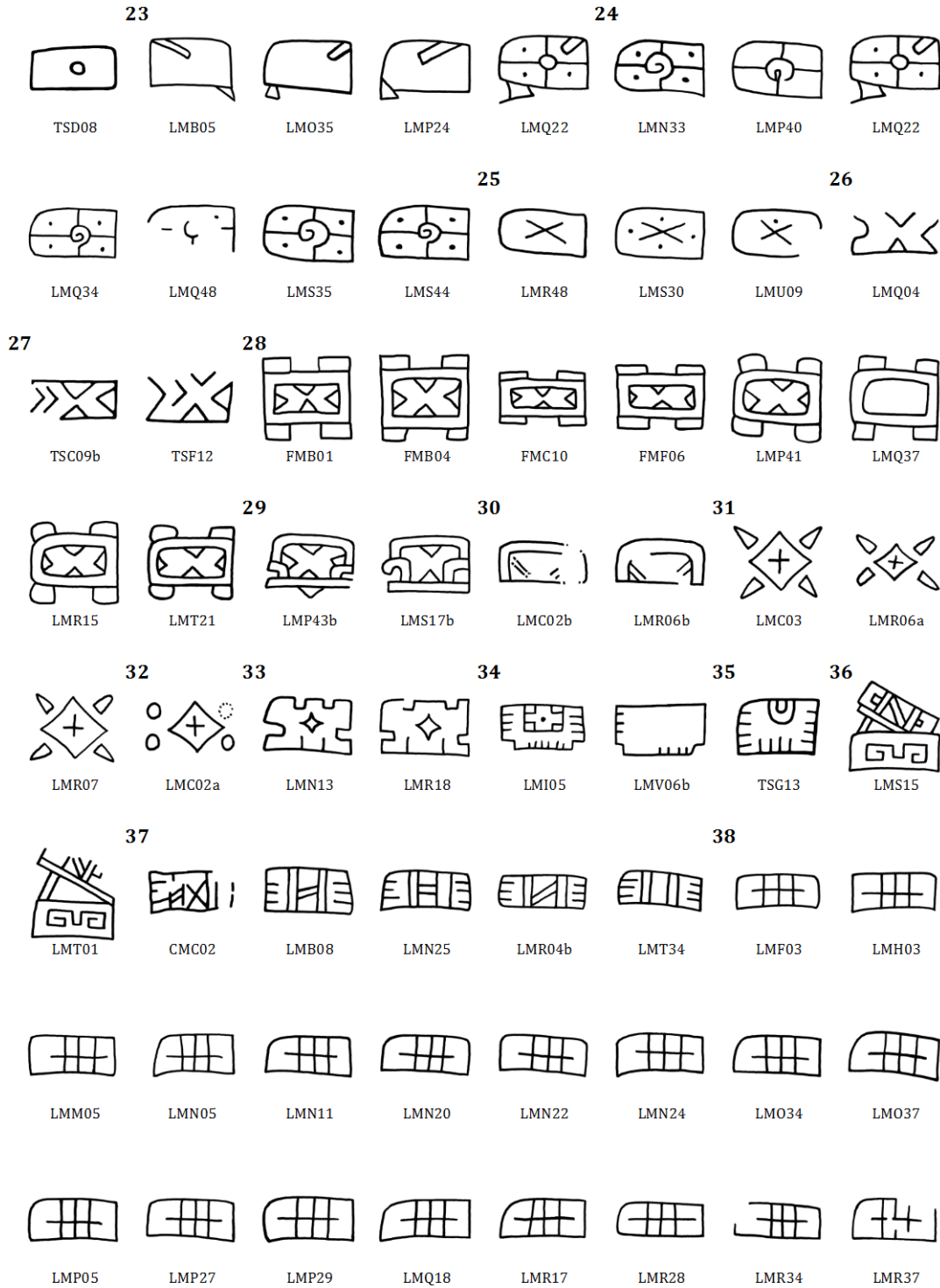
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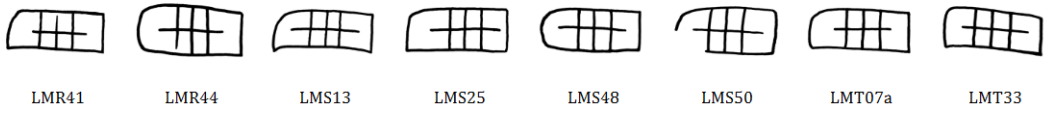
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LMO14	LMO28	LMP09	LMP26	LMP39	LMQ11	LMQ25	LMQ33
LMQ47	LMR03	LMR08	LMR40	LMS12	LMS24	LMS34	LMT06
LMT12	LMT23	LMT28	LMT32	LMT46	LMU14	LMV10	LMV18
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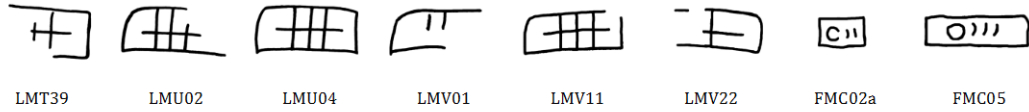
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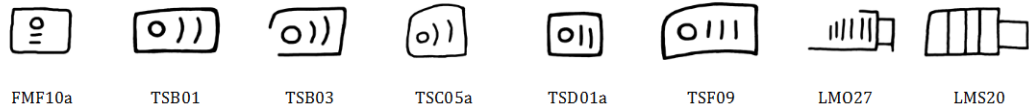


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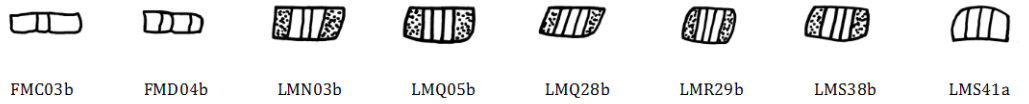


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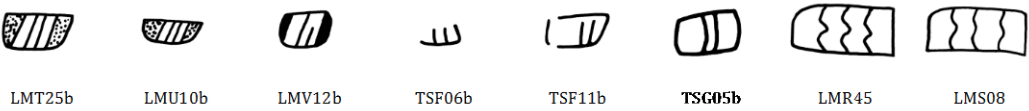
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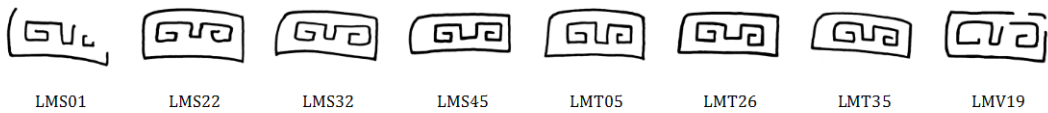
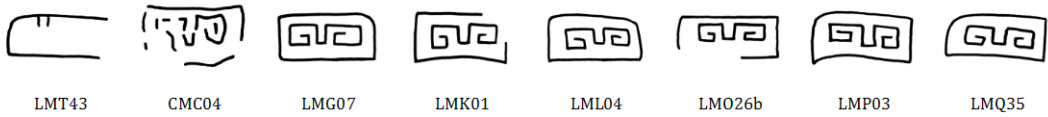
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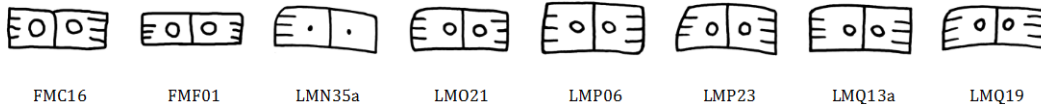


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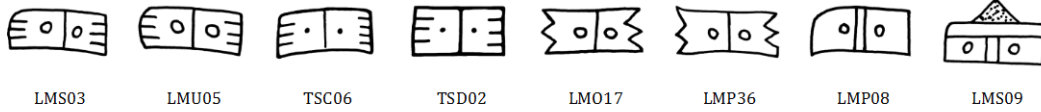
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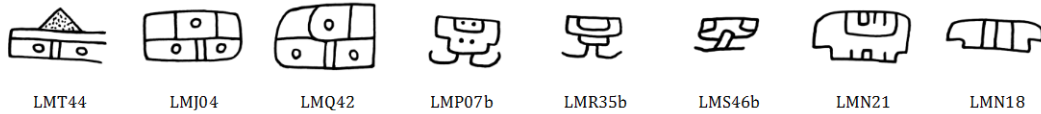


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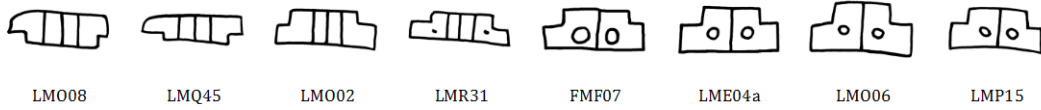
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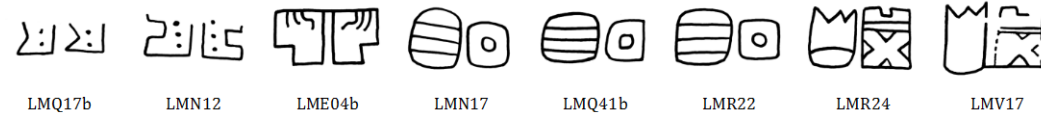


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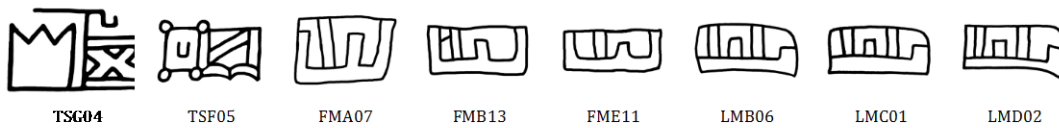
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LMP20 LMQ03 LMQ32 LMQ38 LMR05 LMR13 LMU12 LMV26

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65



TSJ03 LMO04 LMJ01 LMS28 LMO23 LMS27a LMT03 TSG12

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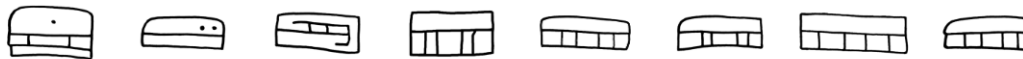
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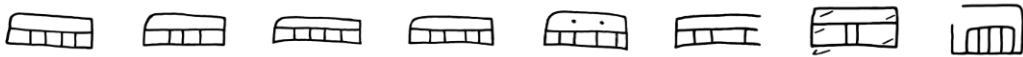
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75



TSD04 LMC05 LMN27 FMD17 FME06 LMD01b LMO25 LMP17b

76

77



LMQ24 LMR23 LMS42b TSD10 TSF13b LMP38a LMO07 LMQ44



78



LMP38b

79



FMA09



FMF09



LMQ09a



LMQ09b

80



LMQ23



LMT11

81



LMR25

82



LMT10



LMQ01

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LMN23



LMP10



LMQ10

84



TSG06

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LMI03



LMN08

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LMI06

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FMD15

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LMP30



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LMS11



LMN38



LMR09



LMT17

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LMO30

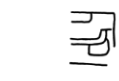
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LMO13



LMR02



LMV29

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TSH01



LMS47

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CDC04



FMB09a



FMC04a



FMD11a



LMJ07



LMK03



LMO33a



LMP01



LMV07a



TSF07a

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TSG02a



TSG07a

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LMP19b



LMA01



LMM08

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LMG04b



LMP14



LMP19a

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TSA01a



FMC06



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LMP43a

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LMS17a



TSB02



LMR21

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FMC14



FME11

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LMU03



CDB05



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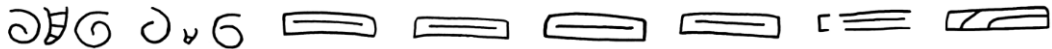
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103



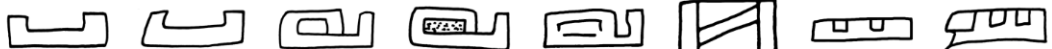
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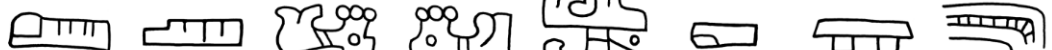
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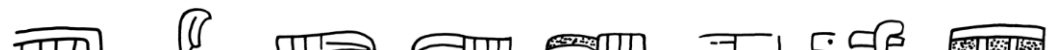


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TSF04 LMB01a LML02 LMO10 LMQ16 LMV24 LML06 LMN03a

117

118

119

120

121

122



LMQ39 TSF03 LML03a LMO11a LMQ17a LMP35 LMQ12 LMJ03



123



LMV21

124



TSE01



CDB01



CDC05



FMB02



FMB06



LMK02



LMP25

125



LMP37



LMQ21



LMR16



LMT22



FMB11



LMB02



LMN34b



LMS41b

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TSC07

127



LMD05

128



LMF01

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LMD01a



LMP17a



LMQ41a



LMS42a



LMT37

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TSF13a

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LMQ29

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TSA07b

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LMP33



LML05

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LMV20



LMO26a

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LMQ27

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LMG04c

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LMO18b

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LMP22b



LMN02

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FMD09



LMC06



LML07



LMR30

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LMS16



LMS40



LMT02



FME04



LMO15



LMP11



LMK05



LMM03

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LMV14



FMC02b



FMC09b



FMC13b



FMD03b



FMD06b



FME02b



FME10b

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FMF05b



FMF10b



TSC05b



TSD01b



LMQ07

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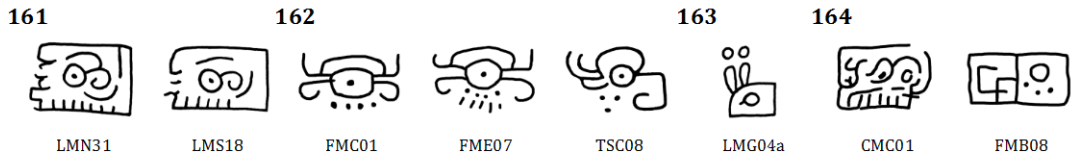
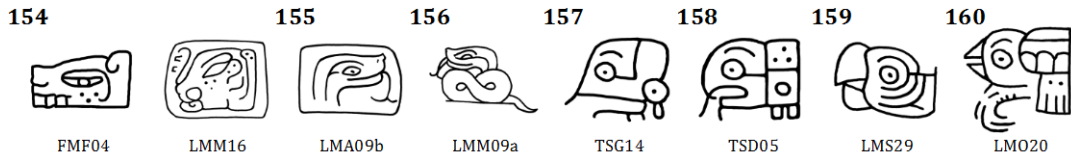
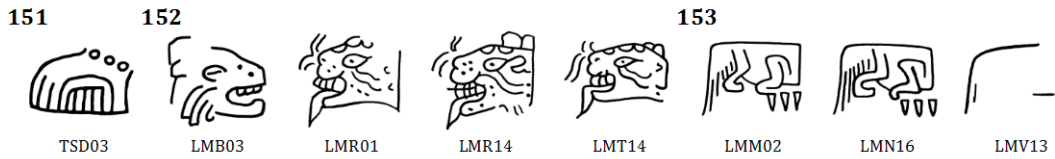
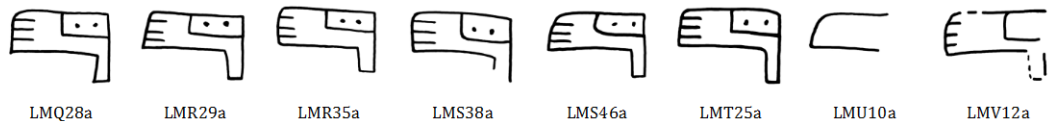
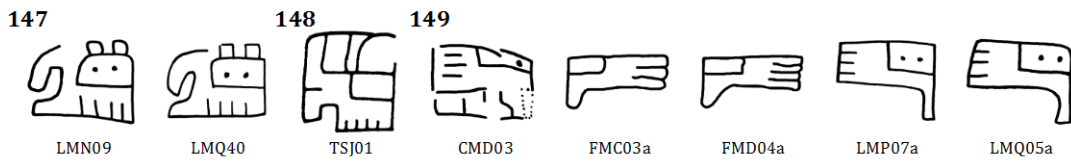
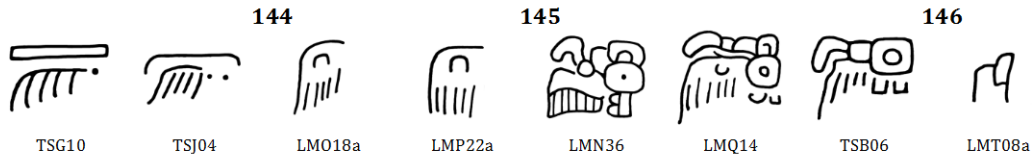
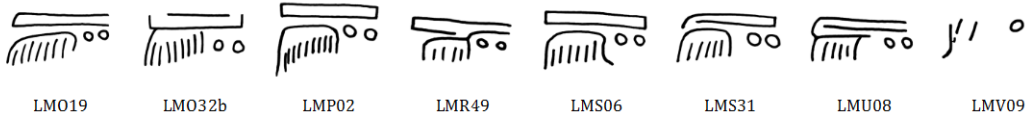
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LMB01b

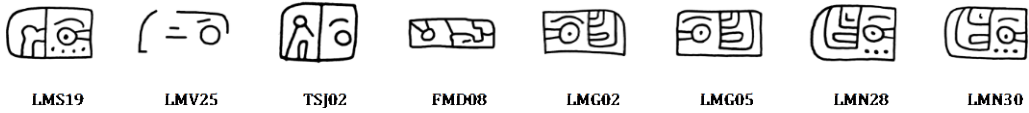


LMJ08





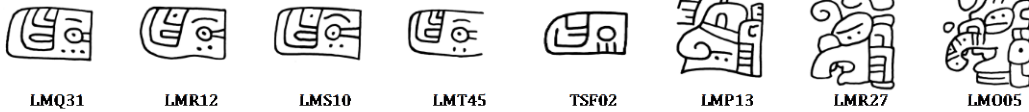
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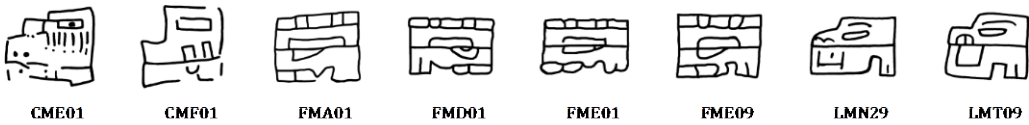
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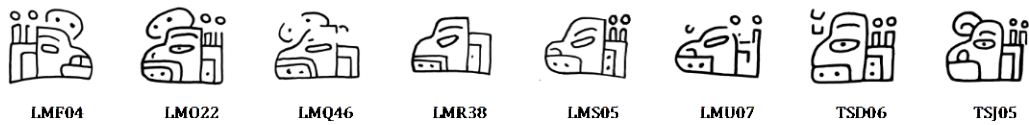
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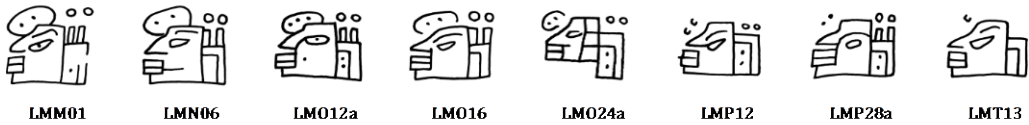
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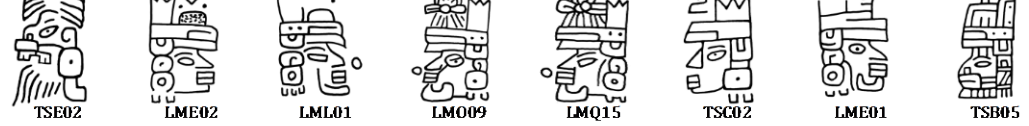
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




































201	202	203	204	205	206	207
FMA02	FMB03	FME12	FMB07	FMF12	FMB12	FMC08b FMD14
	208	209	210	211	212	213
	FME03	FMA06	FMC17	FMA11	FMF08	FMB05 FMF02 FMC11
214		215	216		217	218
FMA03	FMD02	FME16	FMD05	FMD16	FME05	FME08 FMD07
219						
FME13						



Eroded and Partial Signs

0.01  CDB03	0.02  CDB04	0.03  CDC01	0.04  CDC06	0.05  CMA01	0.06  CMA02	0.07  CMA03
0.08  CMB01	0.09  CMB02	0.1  CMB03	0.11  CMB04	0.12  CMD01	0.13  CMD02	0.14  CMD04
0.15  CME02	0.16  CME03	0.17  CMF02	0.18  CMG01	0.19  CMG03	0.2  FMB14	0.21  FMC12
0.22  FMD12	0.23  LMP31	0.24  LMP32	0.25  LMR36	0.26  LMS39	0.27  LMU01	0.28  LMV05
0.29  LMV16	0.3  LMV28	0.31  TSD12	0.32  TSG11	0.33  TSI01		



A List of Texts by Coordinate and Sign Number

CDB01	124	FMA10	13	FMD03	141	FMF07	54	LME01	184
CDB02	20	FMA11	210	FMD04	149	FMF08	211	LME02	181
CDB03	0.01	FMB01	28	FMD04	42	FMF09	79	LME03	20
CDB04	0.02	FMB02	124	FMD05	215	FMF10	39	LME04	54
CDB05	100	FMB03	202	FMD06	39	FMF10	141	LME04	59
CDC01	0.03	FMB04	28	FMD06	141	FMF11	99	LMF01	128
CDC02	100	FMB05	212	FMD07	218	FMF12	204	LMF02	63
CDC03	20	FMB06	124	FMD08	165	LMA01	95	LMF03	38
CDC04	93	FMB07	203	FMD09	138	LMA03	3	LMF04	170
CDC05	124	FMB08	164	FMD10	57	LMA02	110	LMF05	179
CDC06	0.04	FMB09	93	FMD11	93	LMA03	72	LMF06	20
CMA01	0.05	FMB09	100	FMD11	100	LMA04	8	LMG01	63
CMA02	0.06	FMB10	5	FMD12	0.22	LMA05	5	LMG02	165
CMA03	0.07	FMB11	125	FMD13	150	LMA06	3	LMG03	63
CMB01	0.08	FMB12	205	FMD14	207	LMA07	3	LMG04	163
CMB02	0.09	FMB13	63	FMD15	87	LMA08	5	LMG04	96
CMB03	0.1	FMB14	0.2	FMD16	216	LMA09	13	LMG04	136
CMB04	0.11	FMC01	162	FMD17	75	LMA09	155	LMG05	165
CMC01	164	FMC02	39	FME01	169	LMB01	114	LMG06	63
CMC02	37	FMC02	141	FME02	39	LMB01	143	LMG07	44
CMC03	150	FMC03	149	FME02	141	LMB02	125	LMH01	176
CMC04	44	FMC03	42	FME03	207	LMB03	152	LMH02	20
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CMD02	0.13	FMC04	100	FME05	216	LMB05	23	LMH04	101
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CMD04	0.14	FMC06	97	FME07	162	LMB07	109	LMI02	72
CME01	169	FMC07	10	FME08	217	LMB08	37	LMI03	85
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CMF02	0.17	FMC09	141	FME11	63	LMC02	30	LMJ01	64
CMG01	0.18	FMC10	28	FME12	202	LMC03	31	LMJ02	6
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CMG03	0.19	FMC12	0.21	FME14	57	LMC05	74	LMJ04	49
FMA01	169	FMC13	39	FME15	72	LMC06	138	LMJ05	20
FMA02	201	FMC13	141	FME16	214	LMC07	20	LMJ06	97
FMA03	214	FMC14	99	FMF01	45	LMD01	129	LMJ07	93
FMA04	2	FMC15	39	FMF02	212	LMD01	75	LMJ08	143
FMA05	22	FMC16	45	FMF03	9	LMD02	63	LMK01	44
FMA06	208	FMC17	209	FMF04	154	LMD03	176	LMK02	124
FMA07	63	FMD01	169	FMF05	39	LMD04	150	LMK03	93
FMA08	88	FMD02	214	FMF05	141	LMD05	127	LMK04	103
FMA09	79	FMD03	39	FMF06	28	LMD06	63	LMK04	101



LMK05	140	LMN12	58	LMO13	91	LMP12	171	LMQ05	42
LMK06	101	LMN13	33	LMO14	20	LMP13	166	LMQ06	105
LMK07	20	LMN14	72	LMO15	139	LMP14	96	LMQ07	142
LML01	182	LMN15	55	LMO16	171	LMP15	54	LMQ08	100
LML02	114	LMN16	153	LMO17	46	LMP16	69	LMQ09	79
LML03	119	LMN17	60	LMO18	136	LMP17	129	LMQ09	79
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LMM05	38	LMN29	169	LMO27	40	LMP26	20	LMQ19	45
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LMM06	101	LMN31	161	LMO29	72	LMP28	171	LMQ21	124
LMM07	20	LMN32	20	LMO30	90	LMP28	101	LMQ22	23
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LMM12	5	LMN36	145	LMO34	38	LMP34	107	LMQ27	135
LMM13	16	LMN37	20	LMO35	23	LMP35	120	LMQ28	149
LMM14	9	LMN38	89	LMO36	101	LMP36	46	LMQ28	42
LMM15	7	LMO01	13	LMO37	38	LMP37	124	LMQ29	130
LMM16	154	LMO02	53	LMO38	97	LMP38	76	LMQ30	142
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LMN02	137	LMO04	21	LMP02	143	LMP39	20	LMQ32	63
LMN03	116	LMO05	168	LMP03	44	LMP40	24	LMQ33	20
LMN03	42	LMO06	54	LMP04	22	LMP41	28	LMQ34	24
LMN04	63	LMO07	77	LMP05	38	LMP43	97	LMQ35	44
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LMN06	171	LMO09	182	LMP07	149	LMQ01	82	LMQ37	28
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LMN08	85	LMO11	119	LMP08	47	LMQ02	101	LMQ39	117
LMN09	147	LMO11	57	LMP09	20	LMQ03	63	LMQ40	147
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LMQ44	77	LMR34	38	LMS26	22	LMT10	81	LMU05	45
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LMQ49	173	LMR38	170	LMS30	25	LMT15	104	LMU10	149
LMR01	152	LMR39	179	LMS31	143	LMT15	101	LMU10	42
LMR02	91	LMR40	20	LMS32	44	LMT16	3	LMU11	68
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LMR04	109	LMR42	22	LMS34	20	LMT18	178	LMU13	176
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LMR19	72	LMS10	165	LMS47	92	LMT34	37	LMV12	42
LMR20	55	LMS11	88	LMS48	38	LMT35	44	LMV13	153
LMR21	98	LMS12	20	LMS49	174	LMT36	68	LMV14	140
LMR22	60	LMS13	38	LMS50	38	LMT37	129	LMV15	68
LMR23	75	LMS14	22	LMS51	22	LMT38	101	LMV16	0.29
LMR24	61	LMS15	36	LMT01	36	LMT39	38	LMV17	61
LMR25	81	LMS16	138	LMT02	138	LMT40	179	LMV18	20
LMR26	1	LMS17	97	LMT03	65	LMT41	70	LMV19	44
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LMR27	167	LMS18	161	LMT4b	101	LMT43	43	LMV21	123
LMR28	38	LMS19	164	LMT05	44	LMT44	48	LMV22	38
LMR29	149	LMS20	41	LMT06	20	LMT45	165	LMV23	20
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TSA01c	72	TSF02	165		
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TSA03	6	TSF04	113		
TSA04	2	TSF05	62		
TSA05	4	TSF06a	149		
TSA06	17	TSF06b	42		
TSA07a	8	TSF07a	93		
TSA07b	131	TSF07b	100		
TSB01	39	TSF08	20		
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TSB03	39	TSF10	177		
TSB04	73	TSF11a	149		
TSB05	185	TSF11b	42		
TSB06	145	TSF12	27		
TSC01	175	TSF13a	129		
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TSC07	126	TSG05a	149		
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TSC09b	27	TSG07a	93		
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TSD01a	39	TSG08	20		
TSD01b	141	TSG09	171		
TSD02	45	TSG10	143		
TSD03	151	TSG11	0.32		
TSD04	73	TSG12	65		
TSD05	158	TSG13	35		
TSD06	170	TSG14	157		
TSD07	20	TSH01	91		
TSD08	22	TSH02	20		
TSD09	8	TSI01	0.33		
TSD10	75	TSI02	20		



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.

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