

TITLE:

Writing systems of Mesoamerica

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ABSTRACT:

Since the beginning of the first millennium before the Common Era, several writing systems have arisen in Mesoamerica from a common source which can be related to the Olmec culture of the Gulf Coast. Our knowledge of these writing systems greatly varies depending on the degree of their phonetic decipherment, which ranks from the barely known scripts like Olmec, Zapotec or Nuiñe, for which phonetic readings cannot be proposed yet, to the much better known or even almost completely deciphered scripts like Isthmian, Maya or Aztec. In a grammatological comparative perspective, Mesoamerican writing systems offer interesting strategies for encoding language with more or less precision through the usage of graphic signs performing different functions along with the concourse of writing resources, some of which parallel other well known writing resources of other writing systems of the Old World or otherwise represent interesting original Mesoamerican developments. Besides the importance of the historical or cultural contents of their texts, for historical linguistics Mesoamerican writing systems provide valuable information regarding phonology, morphology and syntax, dialectology, language contact, historical sociolinguistics and rhetorics, predating—some times more than one thousand years—the first European ethnohistorical accounts and descriptions.