Stephen Houston holds the Dupee Family Professorship of Social Science at Brown University, where he has taught since 2004. His previous position was as Jesse Knight University Professor at Brigham Young University. Houston took his A.B. at the University of Pennsylvania, M.Phil. And Ph.D. at Yale, and is the author, coauthor, and editor of over 14 books, including The Memory of Bones: Body, Being, and Experience among the Classic Maya (2006, with David Stuart and Karl Taube), Veiled Brightness: A History of Ancient Maya Color (2009, with various colleagues), and The Classic Maya (2009, with Takeshi Inomata), as well as The First Writing: Script Invention as History and Process (2004) and, for Dumbarton Oaks, Classic Maya Place Names (1994, with David Stuart) and Function and meaning in Classic Maya Architecture (1998). Currently the holder of a MacArthur Fellowship (2008-2012), Houston is also the recipient of fellowships from Dumbarton Oaks, the Guggenheim Foundation, the School of American Research, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Houston, a practicing archaeologist, has directed archaeological projects in Guatemala, at Piedras Negras, and more recently at El Zotz, where he supervised, in 2010, the discovery and excavation of a royal tomb. With Dan Finamore, he recently curated the exhibition, Fiery Pool: The Maya and the Mythic Sea, now out as a catalogue by Yale University Press (2010).

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8417 Sewell Social Science Building
1180 Observatory Drive

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Beyond Writing: Notation and Memory at the Margins of Script

Writing is often understood to include the graphic systems that encode and reflect speech. Those systems are familiar to scholars, who, for some centuries, have addressed the origins, development, setting, and extinction of writing in a wide variety of times and places. What lie outside conventional study are the graphic notations that do not clearly express speech – the notches, threads, scratches, potter’s and mason’s marks, the tally sticks of the Middle Ages and the Caribbean banana boat, all of which invade, trigger, and mold memory through well-developed systems of meaning and practice. Because of their ubiquity and broad application, these, too, deserve fresh review, and a reintroduction into the study of human expression.

Free and open to the public.