

**AH/SS399A**  
**Maya Art, Architecture, and Culture**  
**College of Visual Arts**  
**Spring Semester 2007**  
**Dr. Sue Short, Associate Professor**



Maya Rabbit Scribe. Image from Funerary Vase. Illus by M. Coe.

## **Research Project Assignment**

### **Topic and research:**

The research and writing project for this course will bring contemporary Maya textile art into a new context as an expression of some of the fundamental ideas and principles that grounded the ancient Maya civilization.

An exhibition of Guatemalan textiles is currently on display at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, in rooms 255 and 256. The exhibition will continue until April 8, 2007, so students will need to visit the MIA before that time to draw or photograph the textiles to be referenced in the project.

The textiles incorporate images that have roots in the iconography of ancient Maya civilization. The exhibition brochure discusses some of these relationships:

Geometric forms; solar motifs; highly stylized birds, plants, and animals; mythological creatures, and naturalistic flora and fauna are used abundantly on all but the most utilitarian fabrics. The motifs and repeating patterns are drawn primarily from ancient sources and hold many symbolic meanings relating to Maya cosmology and ritual practices . . . Fantastic birds and animals seem to leap from the surface of the cloth, referencing the myths and tales of Maya ancestors . . . (“Maya Dreams: Textile Traditions from the Guatemalan Highlands,” exhibition brochure).

The project assignment is to view the exhibition, to select one or more pieces with images that have symbolic meanings connected with ancient Maya culture, and to research the meaning of those symbols. The research paper will discuss, analyze, and explain the Maya cultural meaning and significance of the symbols, incorporating digital images of the selected contemporary images in the exhibition (digital photos or scanned drawings) and examples of ancient Maya images that draw on the same symbolism. Some symbols blend concepts from the world of the ancient Maya with views of the Spanish conquerors; tracing the roots and transformations of a symbol (e.g. the double-headed eagle or the bird-and-tree motif) would also be a possible strategy for the project. While this project is primarily concerned with the symbolic meaning of the images, discussing the technique involved in creating the textiles with the backstrap loom and weft patterning would also be relevant.

### **Writing requirement:**

You will be writing an eight to ten (8 – 10) page research paper explaining your research and analysis of the symbols you have chosen. The paper must be word processed (or typed) in a standard font, have one inch margins, and be stapled. The paper will account for 30% of your grade in the course.

You must consult a minimum of five (5) sources in addition to the textiles in your research. The course textbook may be one source. At least three of the references must be scholarly sources. Scholarly sources include academic books and journal articles, and would not include magazines designed for general entertainment reading.

*All statements of fact drawn from sources and all images you incorporate in the paper must be correctly cited in the paper in MLA format, and a full bibliography in proper MLA format must be included with the paper. Be careful not to plagiarize materials from the sources as you are writing. It is easy to plagiarize inadvertently if you adopt the words and sentence structures of the authors of your references, even if you change the order of those constructions. Say things in your own words, unless you want to insert a quotation. Use quotations only where the reference communicates something so cogently that you cannot improve upon that manner of expression. Reference sources, such as *The Bedford Handbook*, are available in the CVA library, and give the rules for the MLA citation system. Note that MLA format requires parenthetical citations for references, and not footnotes. You may use footnotes to provide further explanation of various points.*

**You must develop a clear thesis statement** and support the thesis in your paper. A thesis is more than just a recitation of facts; it comes from a synthesis of information and reflects a perspective on the subject with which someone else might disagree. If your thesis is not subject to possible disagreement, it probably is merely a statement of facts, and not a true thesis.

When writing the paper, pay close attention to effective sentence and paragraph structure, proper grammar, and precise word choice. It is not possible to separate the content of your ideas from the way in which you communicate them, so be sure that you are presenting your ideas in the most effective, most powerful way that you can. One strategy for checking your organization plan is to identify the thesis statement in your introduction and the topic sentence of each paragraph in the paper. See whether each of these sentences follows logically from the preceding one and contributes to the development of your thesis. If you cannot identify one topic sentence per paragraph, you may be trying to cover too much ground in that paragraph. If the ideas do not flow logically, you have a problem in the organization of the material.

Consult the *Guide to Writing and Research* for advice and information about research and writing: <http://www.shortstreet.net/research.htm>

### **Independent Work**

Papers you submit in the course must be your own writing, and must not be plagiarized from references or written in whole or in part by another person. (Internet term papers are readily identifiable and will not fulfill the specific requirements for this paper.) You may not submit a paper for this course that has been or will be submitted for credit in another course. **Be aware that plagiarism is a serious academic offense and the penalties can range from failing the assignment or the course to a term of suspension from the college.**