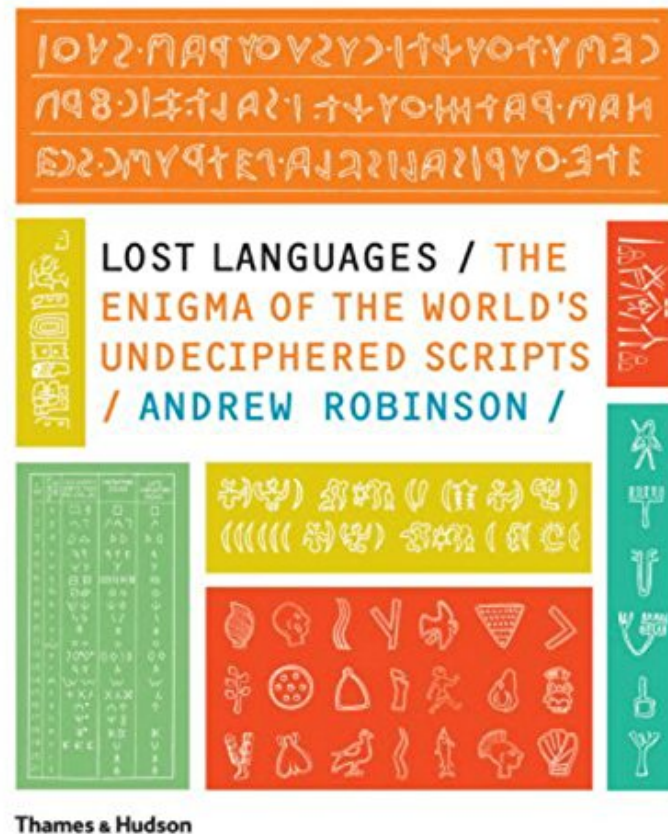


Lost Languages: The Enigma of the World's Undeciphered Scripts

Andrew Robinson

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#921487 in Books imusti 2009-04-06Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.20 x 1.40 x 7.40l, 2.43 #File Name: 050028816X352 pagesThames Hudson | File size: 28.Mb

Andrew Robinson : Lost Languages: The Enigma of the World's Undeciphered Scripts before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Lost Languages: The Enigma of the World's Undeciphered Scripts:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Good readBy RickLike Robinson's previous book, The Story of Writing, this is good reading.In the first part of the book, Robinson describes the various types of writing systems people have developed over time. Many of the ancient writing systems are no longer in use. He explains the techniques used to decipher three of them, as well as some of the dead-end approaches which led nowhere. These chapters are interesting in their own right, but also provide an excellent foundation for the subsequent chapters.In the second part of the book, Robinson describes a number of unsolved scripts. He provides enough information on each script for the reader to get a feel for the writing system and to understand the challenges involved. He also describes various attempts to decode the scripts.Throughout the book Robinson describes the sometimes eccentric and obsessive personalities who have worked on deciphering the various scripts, along with some of the more far-fetched

explanations offered up by some researchers. The book is full of excellent graphics. I don't agree - on either a technical or substantive level - with Robinson's thought-provoking comments in the introductory and concluding chapters that deciphering lost scripts is on a par with cracking the genetic code and other great scientific discoveries. The topic of lost scripts is fascinating, but let's not overdo it! This is a minor quibble because he spends only a few pages on these ideas. The book will be of interest to people who are curious about things or who like to solve puzzles, and would be a good starting point for getting into further research if you are so inclined.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. extremely informative and fascinating
By S.W. This is the first book I've ever bought (or read) that deals solely with the deciphering of scripts. I'm going to try not to get into a really long and elaborate review, like several other people have already done, but I did really enjoy the book. Someone said that it's basically a rehash of information that had already been published, but I personally didn't know most of the things in the book, so I found it to be extremely informative and fascinating. However, while I enjoyed the chapters on the "deciphered" scripts (Egyptian hieroglyphics, Linear B, and the Mayan glyphs), it's UNdeciphered scripts that I'm most interested in, so it's "Part Two" of the book that fascinates me most. I especially like the chapters on rongorongo and the Phaistos Disc. (Even if the Phaistos Disc does turn out to be a hoax, whoever came up with it sure did a good job of making it seem "real," at least to me!) I am a bit disappointed, though, by the chapter on the Proto-Elamite script, because I don't care so much about how ancient people counted, and it seems as though "noting economic records" (to quote the book) MAY (I stress MAY) be all that Proto-Elamite was used for. (I have to say also that I got lost while trying to read about how the Mayan calendar worked! It was too much for me to be able to follow!) Several times through the course of the book, the author reminds us of the dangers of script decipherment, and what approaches should and should NOT be taken; he gives many examples of crackpot theories and "decipherments" that have been put forward, and explains how they're flawed. (I even found the chapter on rongorongo to be good for a few laughs!) Personally, I really don't think I'm ever going to try deciphering any scripts, but like I said, I did really enjoy this book! I think it's great overall; I give it five stars!

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. The Ultimate Code Breaker Book
By Susan Kniebes
It's "decipherment's detective appeal" that has led to the current popularity of books by Dan Brown ("The DaVinci Code," for example) and Steve Berry ("The Templar Legacy," for example). These authors' books all deal with an expert in ancient codes breaking those codes to solve a mystery involving ancient history's impact on the present. In "Lost Languages," Robinson discusses how some of the greatest real-life "code breakers" have successfully deciphered Egyptian hieroglyphs, Linear B from Crete, and the Mayan glyphs from Central America. He then proceeds to discuss the unsuccessful but no less fascinating efforts to decipher such ancient scripts as the Etruscan alphabet from Italy, the Rongorongo script from Easter Island, and the Indus script from Pakistan and India. It is truly fascinating to learn how real-life decipherers took an almost incomprehensible mass of data and contradictory opinions and applied their own knowledge and impressive logic to break (or try to break) the "codes" of these long-unintelligible scripts. Readers who already have a more than passing interest in languages will find the book especially interesting. Just don't try to read the book when your mind isn't ready to concentrate!

Undeciphered scripts have long tantalized the public, whether it's the possibility of hearing the voices of ancient peoples or the puzzle solvers' taste for the challenges posed by breaking codes. Here, Andrew Robinson investigates the most famous examples, beginning with the stories of three great decipherments: Egyptian hieroglyphs, Maya glyphs, and the Minoan Linear B clay tablets. He then covers the important scripts that have yet to be cracked, such as the Etruscan alphabet and Rongorongo from Easter Island. Whether it's the possibility of hearing the voices of ancient peoples or the puzzle solver's taste for the challenges posed by breaking codes, undeciphered scripts have long tantalized the public. Here, Andrew Robinson investigates the most famous examples, beginning with the stories of three great decipherments: Egyptian hieroglyphs, Maya glyphs, and the Minoan Linear B clay tablets. He then tackles the important scripts that have yet to be cracked. Perhaps the greatest challenge is the Indus script, the only writing of the four "first" civilizations that cannot be read and a potential key to better understanding the impressive Indus Valley civilization. Then there are the Etruscans, builders of sensational tombs and the cultural conduit through whom the Greek alphabet reached Rome and the rest of Europe. Yet the language spoken by the Etruscans remains wrapped in mystery. And on isolated Easter Island, the Rongorongo script, inscribed on wood with sharks' teeth, has long been an irresistible magnet for ambitious scholars. The struggle to decipher these three scripts and six others--including the Phaistos disc of Crete and the Zapotec script of Mexico--is recounted with extraordinary depth and erudition in this wonderfully illustrated book. *Lost Languages* is an archaeological and linguistic detective story that will appeal to anyone interested in ancient peoples and the intricacies of language. Andrew Robinson's many books include *The Story of Writing*. 350+ color illustrations

From Publishers Weekly
This richly illustrated book, which highlights the thrills of archeological sleuthing, recounts the many attempts at understanding ancient civilizations through the decipherment of their long-lost writing. Major breakthroughs, such as the Rosetta Stone and its key to Egyptian hieroglyphs, and continuing enigmas such as the undeciphered scripts of the Etruscans and Easter Islanders are explored with all the fervor of a contemporary news

story. Whether conveying the gradual discoveries in cracking Minoan writing and Mayan glyphs or the ongoing frustrations with the mysterious texts of ancient Sudan, Crete, Iran and India, Robinson (*The Story of Writing: Alphabets, Hieroglyphs and Pictograms*) is always careful to address the lay reader in clear prose, and to offer relevant photos, drawings, charts and maps. He also honors the translators themselves and is sympathetic to the obstacles they faced: he describes, for instance, a 16th-century bishop who destroyed Mayan codices even as he left "essential clues" for the decipherment of those that remained; he hails the young 18th-century Englishman whose friends called him "Phenomenon Young" as the man who "really launched the decipherment" of the Rosetta Stone. The decipherers had to challenge conventional wisdom, especially the thinking that ancient glyphs were largely representative icons rather than phonetic symbols like our own alphabets. Readers might be disappointed to learn that decades of decoding were spent on an inventory of goods and accounts and not on grand narratives, but at least they'll never struggle to decipher the book's terms. (Apr.) Forecast: Archeology and linguistics buffs will be delighted with this, as will those familiar with Jacques Derrida's theory of the history of writing systems. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal

Journalist Robinson (*Times Higher Education Supplement*) opens the world of deciphering ancient scripts to general readers by surveying three deciphered scripts, including Egyptian hieroglyphics, and in contrast to Maurice Pope's respected *Story of Decipherment* nine undeciphered scripts, such as Sudan's Meroitic script. Consistently encouraging readers to consider themselves potential decipherers, Robinson initially offers background discussion, including the distinction between deciphering and cracking wartime codes. Next, he identifies hurdles to success, such as whether or not the unknown script can be related to another known language. Finally, Robinson effectively uses numerous graphics of the ancient scripts in brief "assignments" for readers' own deciphering attempts. The three successful deciphering projects are set as examples to prepare readers for the description of unsuccessful or controversial deciphering efforts. Overall, Robinson is successful in making his material accessible, but a more systematic presentation of established deciphering methods would have strengthened his approach. Recommended for academic and large public libraries. Marianne Orme, Des Plaines P.L., IL Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. From *Scientific American*

It is baffling and humbling to confront an incomprehensible form of writing, such as Chinese for most Westerners. People who try to decipher the scripts of lost languages face an even sterner challenge, because there are no contemporary speakers or writers to help. That is the challenge depicted learnedly and fascinatingly by Robinson, literary editor of the *Times Higher Education Supplement* in London. He sets the stage by describing the hard work that went into the three great decipherments: Egyptian hieroglyphs, Linear B of Crete, and Mayan glyphs. Then he poses the problems presented by nine undeciphered scripts, among them the languages of the Etruscans and the people of Easter Island. Success at deciphering, Robinson writes, requires fanatical perseverance and devotion to detail and wide linguistic and cultural knowledge. The book's many illustrations of the enigmatic scripts make vivid the difficulty of the decipherer's task. Editors of *Scientific American*