

The Mayans

LO: to find out about how the Mayan civilisation developed over time.

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Do you remember the story of the Spanish conquistadors who found ruined cities deep in the rainforest of Mesoamerica?



In the 16th century, Spanish explorers came across the ruins of mysterious abandoned cities. It wasn't until 150 years later in the 19th century that historians and archaeologists really began to study these remains and understand about the Mayan people who left them behind.

Do you know what an archaeologist does?



Archaeologists find the objects and buildings that people in the past have left behind to learn about history. When archaeologists started exploring the ruins, they found a wealth of information about the Mayans.

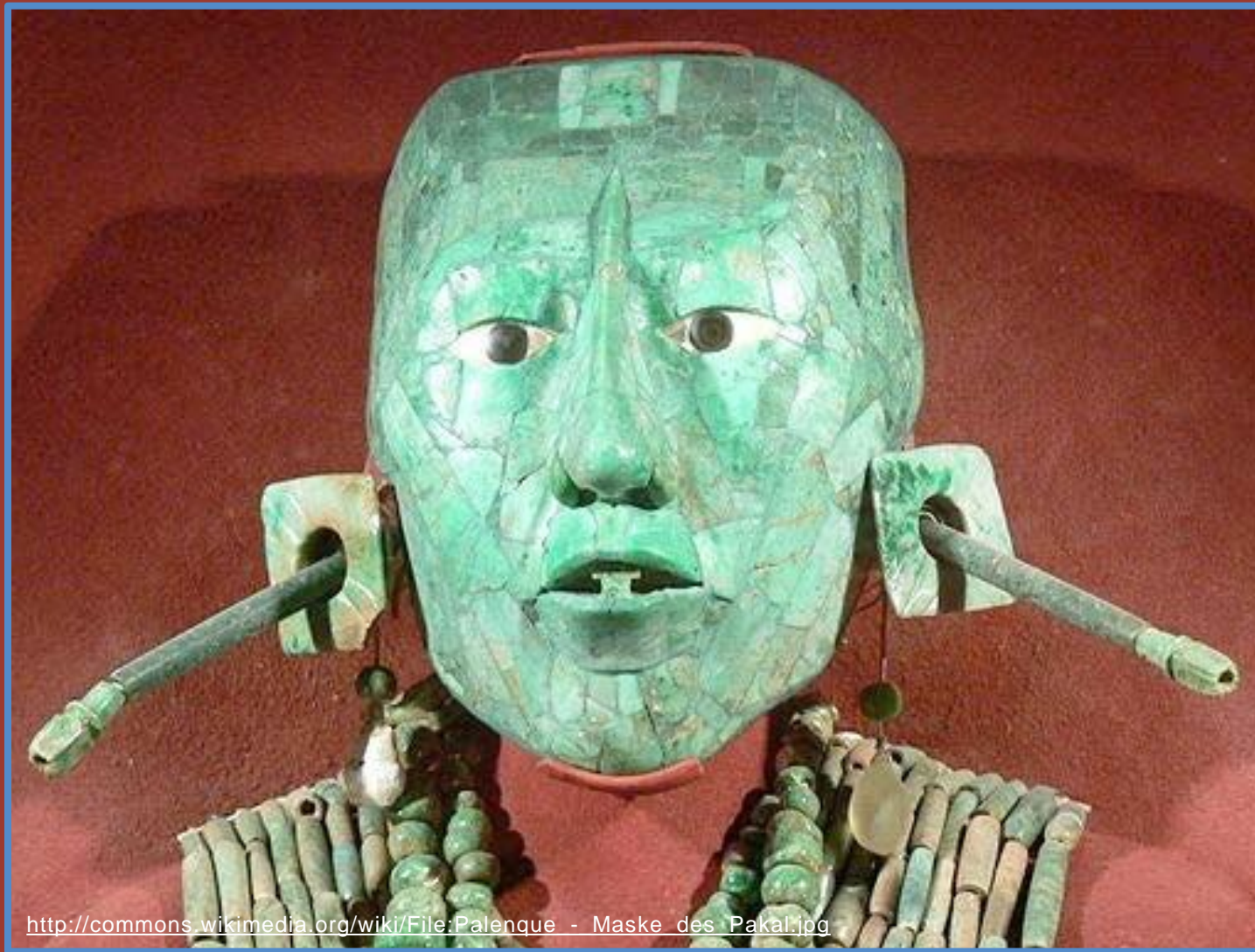


Archaeologists were able to find out a lot about how Mayan society was organised from looking at the buildings. They knew that the Mayans had temples for worship and palaces for kings.

This is a Mayan temple now known as El Castillo in the Mayan city of Chichen Itza. It was a temple built to worship a god called Kukulcan.



Archaeologists discovered many objects and artefacts that tell us about society and how these people lived.



This is the funeral mask of King Pakal of Palenque.



These are Mayan flutes.

Archaeologists discovered the Mayans had their own writing system. This system used hieroglyphs (pictures) to represent words or sounds. People called epigraphers studied the hieroglyphs until they understood what they meant. Studying Mayan writing on walls, stone and other artefacts helps us find out about the Maya.



This stone slab is called a stela. Lots of stelae have been found with Mayan hieroglyphs on.



Over many years of research, historians have been able to learn a lot about Mayan history. They know that there were lots of different groups of people living in Mesoamerica and that the Mayan people first settled there around the year 5000 BC.



Let's have a look at a timeline of Mayan history...

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5000 BC - 2000 BC	Hunter-gatherers live in the rainforests and volcanic mountains.
2000 BC - 1000 BC	People begin to farm and settle in small villages. People copy the crafts of the Olmec people, including making pottery and carving with jade. Basic trade begins (people would trade something they had made for food).
900 BC	Farmers begin to use irrigation systems – a way to direct water into fields - to help their plants to grow. This means larger settlements can form.
300 BC	The first cities begin to develop and the Mayan population grows rapidly.
292 BC	The first known Mayan writing is produced.
50 BC	The first temple is built in Cerros.
250 AD	The Maya begin their most powerful era. Astronomy, mathematics and architecture are all developing.
300 AD	The Maya adopt the idea of a monarchy and are now ruled by kings.
500 AD - 800 AD	Major cities begin to thrive, such as Tikal, Palenque, Uxmal and Copan. Fine temples and palaces are built. Art, culture and religion all reach their peak.
800 - 900 AD	The major Mayan cities begin to decline and are eventually abandoned.



What can we learn about the Maya from this timeline?

Task 1:

Using the timeline information, create your own timeline to show how Mayan civilisations developed through the years. Make your timeline interesting and colourful with pictures to represent each stage of development.

Example:

Hunter-gatherers live in the rainforests and volcanic mountains



5000 BC - 2000 BC

People begin to farm, settle in small villages and trade.



2000 BC - 1000 BC

Task 2:

Look at the pictures of the different ancient Mayan artefacts, that archaeologist have discovered, and list which of the statements below are true and which are false.

The Mayans were good at making pottery.	Only Mayan warriors wore headdresses.	The Mayans only carved stone.
The Mayans didn't make furniture.	The Mayans didn't know how to use paints.	The Mayans used a green stone called jade.
The Mayans made jewellery from metal.	Mayan warriors wore shields.	The Mayans ate corn at religious festivals.
Only rich people could wear jewellery.	The Mayans made jewellery.	The Mayans didn't know how to make beads.
The Mayans were not good at crafts.	The Mayans didn't wear headdresses.	The Mayans wore masks.
The Mayans were good at carving stone.	Mayan women made pottery.	The Mayans didn't make weapons.
Only men were allowed to play instruments.	The Mayans played musical instruments.	Mayan children were not allowed in temples.