

Artful Adventures

Realm of the Maya

An interactive
guide for families



Your
Mesoamerican
Adventure
Awaits You!

See inside for details



Artful Adventures Mesoamerica

Our journey today takes us to the galleries of the ancient Americas, where we will look at objects from the Maya, a group that, at its height, covered one third of Mesoamerica. These galleries are on the lower level of the Museum. Walk down the stairs and turn right. Walk through the ancient Greek and Egyptian galleries and turn right again, into the galleries of the ancient Americas.

Find the Maya area of the map (green). This area is part of present-day Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador. The Maya lived in city-states ruled by kings and developed a very accurate calendar, thanks to Maya astronomers. They were excellent mathematicians and devised a complicated form of writing. Because we can

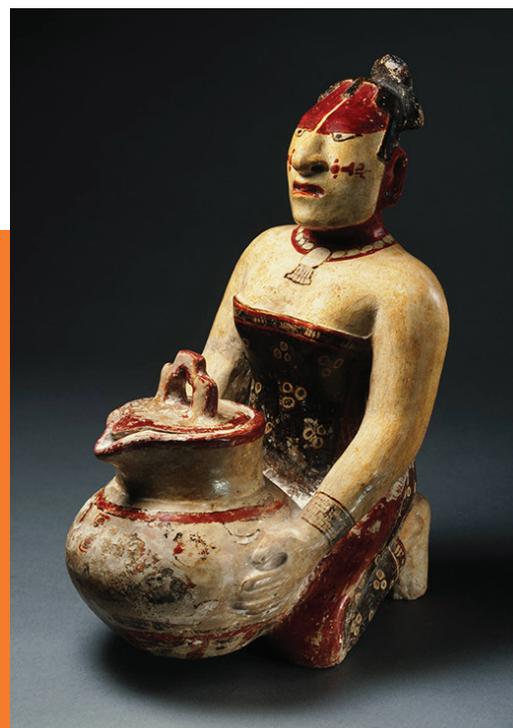
read their writing, we have been able to learn a great deal about the ancient Maya people.



MAYA BEAUTY

The Maya thought that this woman was very beautiful. Look at the shape of her head: it is long and pointed, with her hair in a tight bun and stepped bangs. The Maya liked this pointed shape because it looks like a corncob. Corn, or maize, was an important crop for the Maya. They depended on it for food and believed that all good things came from corn. They even believed that people were made from corn dough. The Maya wrapped babies' heads tightly with cloth, shaping their heads like this woman's.

The painted designs on this woman's cheeks were probably intended to represent her breath, which the Maya believed was a person's spirit, or life force. If you look carefully, you can see a hole through the front of her nose where a nose bead or tube once was. The paint on her cheeks might also be decorative extensions of this bead or tube.



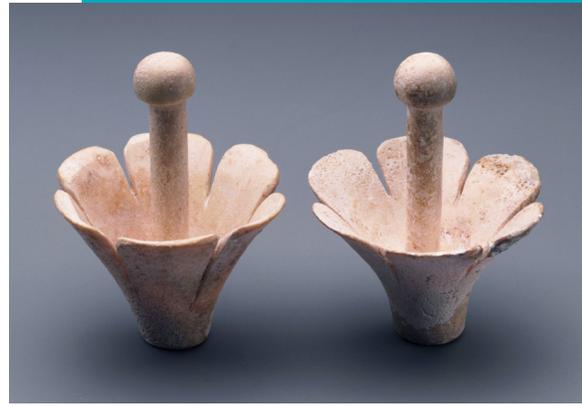
Central(?) lowlands, Maya area, Mexico or Guatemala, Late Classic, Maya, Kneeling noble woman holding a lidded jar, A.D. 650–750. Ceramic with polychrome slip. Museum purchase, Fowler McCormick, Class of 1921, Fund (2005-65 a-b). Photo: Bruce M. White.

She wears a painted necklace and she probably once had earrings. Note that her face is painted red and white, as if she were wearing makeup. The Maya, like many cultures, valued personal ornamentation, things they wore to decorate their bodies. The ornamentation a person wore told others which family he or she was from and how powerful they were.

Find these objects



Maya, Early Classic, Earflares in the form of flowers, A.D. 350–600. Jadeite. Promised bequest of Gillett G. Griffin (L1985.67)



Maya, Late Classic, Earflares in the form of flowers, A.D. 600–800. Conch shell. Gift of Gillett G. Griffin (2003-25 a-d)

These are earflares, ornaments worn in the earlobe. Maya nobles pierced the earlobes of their children, both male and female, when they were babies. As a child grew, larger ornaments were inserted to make the holes bigger. These earflares are in the shape of flowers. One pair was carved from jade, and the other was carved from a conch shell; both are rare and precious materials.

Why do you think the artists chose to make these earflares look like flowers?

Perhaps these earflares look like flowers because the Maya believed that breath, one's soul or life force, was fragrant and exited the body through all of the openings in the head. Another possibility is that they thought that flowers, which are beautiful and smell nice, would have made the sounds that the person heard also nice.

Can you think of examples of personal ornamentation that people wear today?

Do these things tell you anything about the person's culture, or the groups they are associated with?

CYLINDER VESSELS



Nakbé region, Central lowlands, Maya area, Petén, Guatemala, Late Classic, Maya ('Codex' style), The Princeton vase, A.D. 600-800. Granular gray-buff ceramic, mineral inclusions with orange-red and brown-black slip decoration. Museum purchase, gift of the Hans A. Widenmann, Class of 1918, and Dorothy Widenmann Foundation (y1975-17). Photo: Bruce M. White. Below: detail

Look at the side of the vessel that shows the scene depicted in the image on the left. The figure in this scene is a god of the Underworld, sitting on a throne in a palace. We call him God L. He is very old and has no teeth. An owl is perched on the top of God L's hat, which has owl feathers as well as feathers from the quetzal bird. The Maya loved quetzals for their bright, colorful feathers and long tails. They would catch live birds, pluck their tail feathers, and let them go.

God L is tying a bracelet on the wrist of the woman in front of him. The Maya would have thought that this woman was very beautiful. Look at the top of her head. Does the shape and long flowing hair remind you of the Maya woman we looked at earlier? Can you find the rabbit under God L's throne? He is writing something. What do you think he is writing?



Walk around the vase to the right and find the image shown on the left. This woman is pouring liquid from a vessel that looks just like this one. What do you think she is pouring?

Did you guess chocolate? You are correct!

Mesoamericans were the first people to make chocolate. They did not eat chocolate bars; they drank chocolate. Making chocolate is not easy. It is made from the pods of the cacao (pronounced kah KOW) tree. The pods of this tree have seeds that can be made into chocolate. The Maya would roast the seeds, grind them into a paste, and mix the paste with water, chili peppers, cornmeal, and other ingredients. The last step in making the chocolate is shown on this vase. The woman is pouring the chocolate back and forth between a cup and a pot, which made the chocolate frothy. How do you think Maya chocolate would taste?

bitter

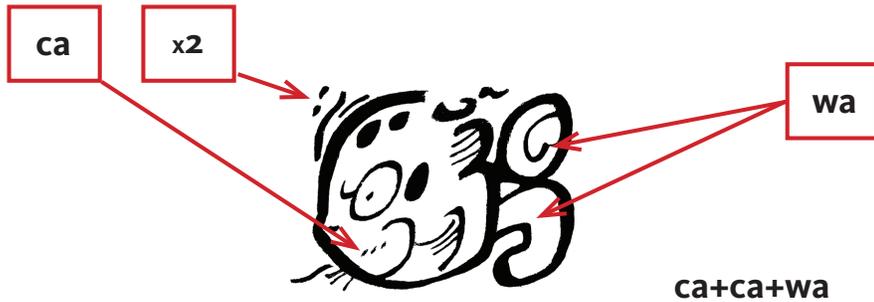
sweet

spicy

syru~~y~~py



Have you noticed the shapes around the top of most of the vessels in these cases? These are Maya glyphs, or writing. Instead of using an alphabet, the Maya wrote with pictures called hieroglyphs. Some of the pictures represent whole words, while others represent a sound or a syllable. This glyph, for example, means cacao, or chocolate: Can you find it on any of the vessels in the cases?



The writing on this vase tells us what is happening in the scene. The glyph directly above this scene tells us that the vase held chocolate. The writing also tells us that the person who owned this pot was named Bird Quetzal and that he was from the south.

Writing Activity

NUMBERS

The Maya wrote their numbers using a dot for 1 and a bar for 5. Zero was a shell shape.



Now try writing your phone number the way the Maya would!

□ □ □ - □ □ □ □





Find the case of small human figurines in the center of the gallery.

Look carefully at the figures and think about what you see. What are they wearing? What does their clothing tell you about these people? How old are they? How can you tell?

1 SPY...

1. Can you find a man with a large ring around his waist and a bird on his head?

This is a ballplayer. The Maya played an early team sport called the ballgame, in which they struck the ball with their hips. The padding this man wears around his waist would have protected him from the heavy rubber ball. The bird headdress might have been used to distinguish one team from another.

2. Can you find a man wearing a feather cape and a loincloth?

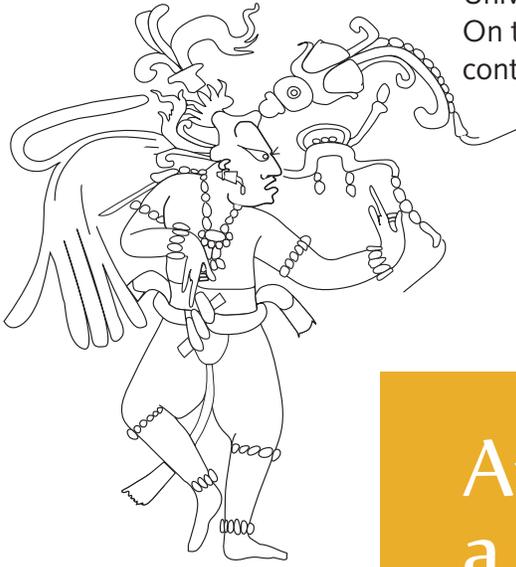
This man's open mouth, large chest, and open arms make us think he may have been a court singer.

3. Can you find a woman with a fierce face who is holding a shield?

This is the Maya goddess Chak Chel. She is dressed as a warrior because the Mesoamerican people considered giving birth to be the female equivalent of men going to war.



Thank you for joining us today to explore the art of Mesoamerica. Don't forget to stop at the Information Desk to collect a sticker for your Artful Adventures Passport. We hope that you enjoyed your visit to the Princeton University Art Museum and that you join us for another Artful Adventure! On the following pages you will find suggestions for ways that you can continue your Mesoamerican Adventure at home:



Art Project: Making a Maya Chocolate Pot

Supplies:

Construction paper or cardstock

Colored pencils

Tape

Take a piece of construction paper or card stock and fold it in half length-wise. This will be the outside of your pot.

Make up a short story for your pot. It can be a story that you create or you can use a favorite story that you already know. You can tell your story in words first: write it on a piece of paper or have a grown-up write it for you.

Now choose three scenes or characters from your story to draw on your pot. Divide the folded paper into three sections and draw your three scenes or characters.

When you are finished, roll the paper into a cylinder and tuck one end into the other. Tape the two ends together.



Suggested Reading

***Miro in the Kingdom of the Sun*, by Jane Kurtz and David Frampton (woodcuts)**

In this folktale a young Inca girl succeeds where her brothers and others have failed, when her bird friends help her find the special water that will cure the king's son.

(Gr K-3)

***Aztec, Inca, and Maya*, by Elizabeth Baquedano**

This book chronicles the history, beliefs, and everyday lives of the ancient Aztec, Inca, and Maya peoples.

(Gr 3-5)

***Amazing Maya Inventions You Can Build Yourself*, by Sheri Bell-Rehwooldt**

This rich resource combines historical facts about the Maya with entertaining and educational craft projects.

(Gr 3-6)

***National Geographic Investigates Ancient Inca: Archaeology Unlocks the Secrets of the Inca's Past*, by Beth Gruber and Johan Reinhard (consultant)**

Photographs and illustrations pepper this informative guide to recent archeological finds and what they tell us about the Inca.

(Gr 3-7)

***Before Columbus: The Americas of 1491*, by Charles C. Mann**

This study of Native American societies is adapted for younger readers from Charles C. Mann's best-selling *1491*. Turning conventional wisdom on its head, the book argues that the people of North and South America lived in enormous cities, raised pyramids hundreds of years before the Egyptians did, engineered corn, and farmed the rainforests.

(Gr 6+)

All of these books can be found in the children's section of the Princeton Public Library.

