

How Does Technology Change the Way Historians Interpret the Past? Consider these Questions.

What did the video claim about how historians learned about the Maya and how Mayan glyphs were understood in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries?

How did technology change the way historians interpreted the ancient Maya?

Look at the following panel of Mayan glyphs. What do you think they mean? Who do you think commissioned them? List the kinds of information historians need to interpret texts like Mayan glyphs. How do you think historians gain the kinds of information you listed?



Description: Carved limestone panel with three figures. The central figure, K'inich K'an Joy Chitam II, stands in a dancing posture holding aloft a serpent-footed axe and wearing the shell earpiece of GI. His father, K'inich Janaab Pakal (right), and mother, Lady Tz'akbu Ajaw (left) sit flanking him. Pakal holds a small, full-figure K'awiil and Lady Tz'akbu Ajaw holds a personified Jester God. The text records an anniversary of the death of his ancestor, K'an Joy Chitam I.

Current Location: Washington, DC, Dumbarton Oaks

Use the descriptive information below to check your previous understanding of the glyph's meaning to the Mayan rulers who commissioned it.

- K'inich K'an Joy Chitam II was thirteenth Mayan ruler of Palenque (702–722 CE).
- K'inich K'an Joy Chitam II's dancing posture may be related to the Mayan creation story in *The Popul Vuh* that tells of Hun-Nal-Yeh who, after being beheaded by gods of the underworld, was reborn from his own severed head as a handsome young man, dressed by beautiful girls for triumphal dancing. Dancing might be interpreted as a symbol of a new ruler coming to power.
- K'awiil was a god of lightning, often represented with one snake foot and an axe in his forehead. Because he also was a protector of royal lines, he often is included on kings' scepters. The snake-footed axe is a symbol of royalty.
- GI is the oldest of the triad sibling gods of the Maya. He is associated with the planet Venus as well as the sun, and is shown wearing a shell earpiece.
- The personified Jester God, usually shown in a three-pointed cap, is another ancient symbol of Maya

royalty. The form is developed from the Olmec reverence for the maize plant, stylized in Olmec art with only three leaves.

- The ancestor K'an Joy Chitam I was the fifth Mayan ruler of Palenque (529–565).

Mayan Glyphs question: In what way does the increasing understanding of Mayan glyphs through epigraphy, archaeology, and ethnography reveal the way that historians do their work?