

# Giant sculptured Mayan head found

January 27 2010, by Lin Edwards

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Maya mask at the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City. Image: Wolfgang Sauber, via Wikipedia.

(PhysOrg.com) -- A decorated Mayan head measuring three meters (10 feet) at the base and sculptured out of stucco has been unearthed in northern Guatemala, near the border with Mexico. The sculpture had been buried for centuries under the thick jungle, and its presence may suggest the site could have been part of a Mayan city.

Archaeologists from the Polytechnic University of Valencia and the University of Valencia in [Spain](#) recently found the [sculpture](#) in the Chilonché ruins in the jungle-covered Petén region. The team are experts in stuccoed artifacts and their restoration and conservation. They have dated the giant head to the early Classical period of 300-600 AD, which is considerably older than other artifacts found at the site, and means the site is older than thought previously. The find is in excellent condition and some of its original colors have been preserved.

One of the archaeology team, Professor Gaspar Muñoz Cosme, said the find was “spectacular” and the sculpture could be linked to Mayan mythology, and possibly represents an imaginary being such as a Mayan god, or an underworld figure. He said the discovery provides important scientific data that helps us understand the architecture of the Mayans of the time. The team hopes to find similar heads at the site, since the Mayans often built and arranged multiple items symmetrically.

The Petén region is close to well-known Mayan cities such as Tikal and Nakum. It contains dozens of Mayan ruins, but the site at Chilonché has not been excavated to a great extent, largely because the thick jungle region is home to poachers, looters looking for artifacts to sell on the black market, and drug smugglers carrying cocaine to nearby [Mexico](#). The giant head was found inside one of the tunnels built by looters at the site. As soon as the find was located, the [archaeologists](#) contacted Guatemalan authorities to ensure security around the site was tightened because of the significance of the find.

The giant figurehead sculpture is similar to other sculptured heads found at Uaxactun, where they decorated a solar observatory. In the Classical period from 300 to 900 AD the Mayans built vast cities and towering pyramids in an extensive area of Central America from Mexico through Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Belize. The reasons for the collapse of the Mayan civilization in the last century or so of the Classical period remain a mystery, but may have been linked to deforestation and resulting climate change and extended droughts and crop failures.

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