

Mayan Civilization and Collapse

An inquiry-based lesson

Please answer the introductory questions on the handout:

1. List as many fallen civilizations as you can.
2. How can we tell when a civilization has fallen?
What are the signs?
3. What **causes** civilizations to fall?

Quick overview of the Classical Maya

- Using the form provided, take down brief notes on the following aspects of Mayan civilization. Also take notes on *why* we think we know what we do (what evidence or data we have).

Mayan PFOS

- Decentralized – NOT AN EMPIRE
- “Mayan” refers to a culture, like ancient Greeks
- City-states ruled by separate divine kings
- Sometimes alliances formed; sometimes small empires as individual kings increased and decreased power & territory



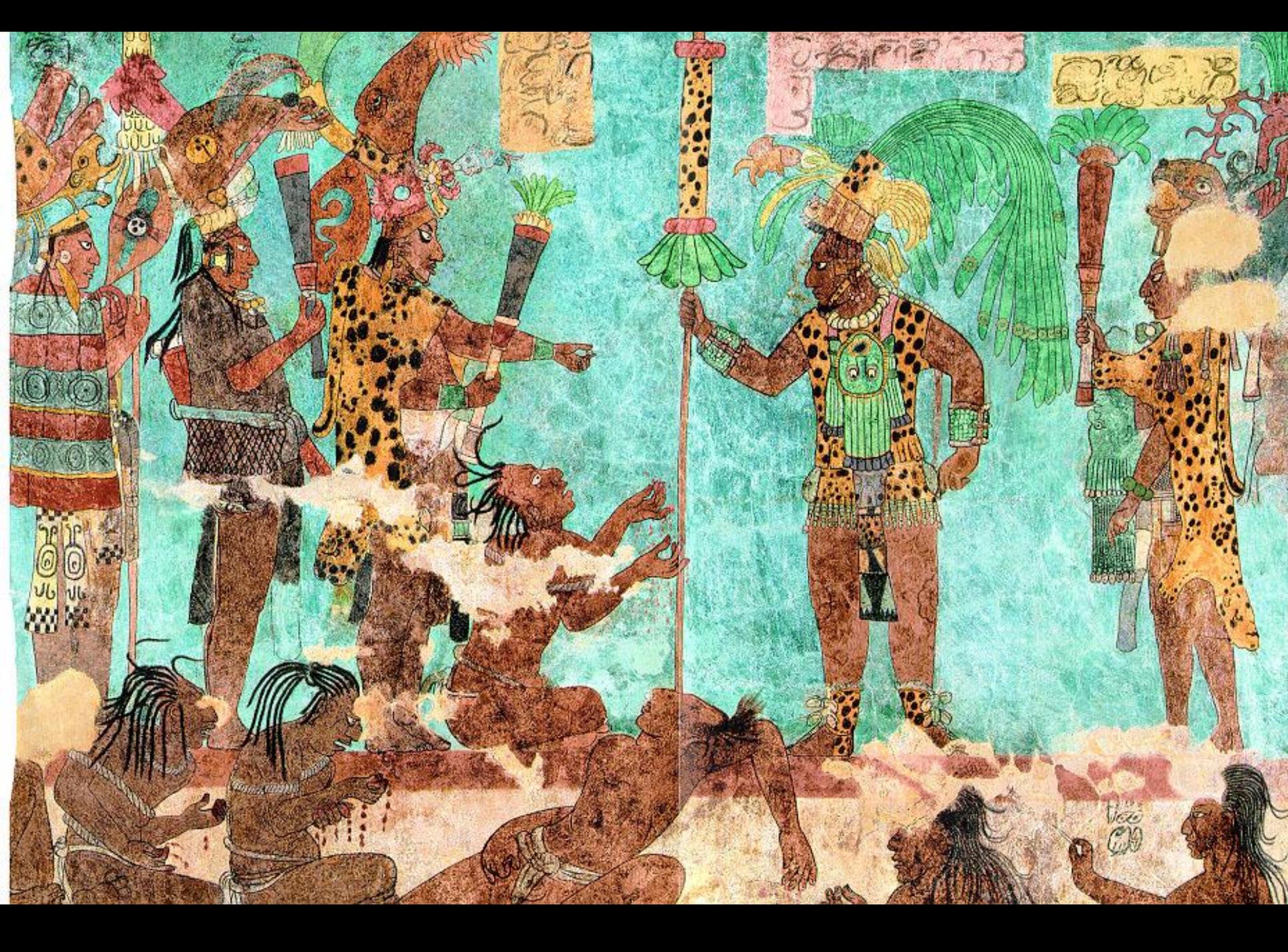
- Archeological sites show distinct similarities
- Several sites have special structures that are evidence of a ruler
- Mayan texts mention multiple centers of power, tribute relationships



Mayan PFOS – Theater State

- Kings and nobility wore special costumes, lived in impressive buildings, and conducted expensive rituals to awe commoners
- Had to maintain appearances gave them power with the peasants
- Devoted enormous amounts of resources to this end





Mayan Monumental Architecture

- Large pyramid-like structures used as ritual sites
- Special palaces for the King & Nobles – part of the theater-state (like the stage)
- No wheels – took huge amounts of human energy
- No (or little) animal power – not oxen or horses



Mayan Geography

- Meso-America
- Humid plains areas
- Wetter coastal regions
- Forested areas, esp. on slopes



Mayan Economy

- Extensive reliance on corn (maize)
- No significant domesticated animals to use as cargo transport – trade mostly for ceremonial objects used by the theater state
- Tribute paid by commoners to King & nobles
- Used slash-and-burn agriculture
- Used cisterns to store water from wet years to use during dry periods



Warfare

- Warfare between city-states common
- Some city-states grew more powerful by conquest – but never enough to form empire
- Constant competition
- Captives treated brutally
- When Mayan civilization weakened, were invaded by the Toltec

