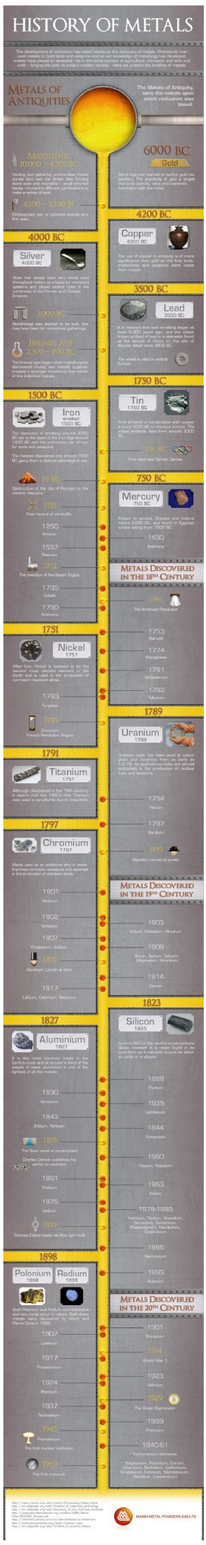
History of Metals Timeline

The development of civilisation has relied heavily on the discovery of metals. Prehistoric man used metals to build tools and weapons and as our knowledge of metallurgy has developed, metals have played an essential role in the advancement of agriculture, transport and arts and craft – forging the path to today's modern society.

At Makin Metal Powders we supply a range of metal powders and decided to highlight the discovery of all known metals in a graphical timeline (there is a text version below) – please share it and let us know what you think.



There are currently 86 known metals but before the 19th century only 24 had been discovered and, of these 24 metals, 12 were discovered in the 18th century.

The Metals of Antiquity, were the metals upon which civilisation was based.

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Gold (ca) 6000BC

Stone Age man learned to fashion gold into jewellery. The popularity of gold is largely due to its scarcity, value and mankind's fascination with the metal.

Copper, (ca) 4200BC

The use of copper in antiquity is of more significance than gold as the first tools, implements and weapons were made from copper.

Silver,(ca) 4000BC

Silver had been widely used throughout time as a basis for monetary systems and played central roles in the currencies of the Roman and Chinese Empires.

Lead, (ca) 3500BC

It is believed that lead smelting began at least 9,000 years ago, and the oldest known artefact of lead is a statuette found at the temple of Osiris on the site of Abydos dated circa 3800 BC.

Tin, (ca) 1750BC

First smelted in combination with copper around 3500 BC to produce bronze. The oldest artifacts date from around 2000 BC.

Iron,smelted, (ca) 1500BC

The discovery of smelting around 3000 BC led to the start of the Iron Age around 1200 BC and the prominent use of iron for tools and weapons.

Mercury, (ca) 750BC

Known to ancient Chinese and Indians before 2000 BC, and found in Egyptian tombs dating from 1500 BC.

Mercury, (ca) 750BC

1735 - Cobalt
1751 - Nickel
1774 - Manganese
1781 - Molybdenum
1782 - Tellurium
1783 - Tungsten
1789 - Uranium
1789 - Zirconium
1791 - Titanium
1794 - Yttrium
1797 - Beryllium
1797 - Chromium
1801 - Niobium
1802 - Tantalum
1803 - Iridium, Palladium, Rhodium
1807 - Potassium, Sodium
1808 - Boron, Barium, Calcium, Magnesium, Strontium
1814 - Cerium
1817 - Lithium, Cadmium, Selenium
1823 - Silicon
1827 - Aluminium
1828 - Thorium
1830 - Vanadium
1839 - Lanthanum
1843 - Erbium, Terbium
1844 - Ruthenium
1860 - Cesium, Rubidium
1861 - Thallium
1863 - Indium
1875 - Gallium
1878-1885 - Holmium, Thulium, Scandium, Samarium, Gadalinium, Praseodynium, Neodynium, Dysprosium
1886 - Germanium
1898 - Polonium, Radium
1899 - Actinium
1901 - Europium
1907 - Lutetium
1917 - Protactinium
1923 - Hafnium
1924 - Rhenium
1937 - Technetium
1939 - Francium
1945 - Promethium
1940-61 - Transuranium elements – (Neptunium, Plutonium, Curium, Americum, Berkelium, Californium, Einsteinium, Fermium, Mendelevium, Nobelium, Lawrencium)

We hope you enjoy looking at the discovery of metals timeline, if you decide to use the image on your site we'd love to hear about it, drop us an email to mmp@makin-metals.com