



Mayans



The Mayans developed a writing and number system; studied and charted the stars and planets; invented three complex calendars to keep track of time; built impressive temples, palaces, monuments and cities; skillfully farmed the land and established a complex political system. The ancient Maya were a clever, deeply religious people who valued intelligence and learning which is why they were able to develop a complex, thriving civilization. The area the Maya used to live in spreads over 5 countries: Mexico (southern Mexico and the Yucatan Peninsula), Belize, Guatemala, a small area of west Honduras and the very north of El Salvador.

Key Knowledge

The Maya civilisation came into being around 2000 BC and cities such as El Mirador became large and powerful from 300 BC onwards. Cities like Chichen Itza were still thriving in AD 1000 and the Maya civilisation was still in existence in AD 1500.

Creation and Religion

Religion was an integral part of the ancient Maya culture, intertwined with all other aspects of society. The Maya believed in and worshipped a number of different gods. They believed that the gods had a good side and a bad side and that they could help or hurt them. The Maya people performed many different religious rituals often performed during festivals or special ceremonies. Stone carvings show rulers and nobles giving blood sacrifices. The Maya believed that the gods gave their own blood to create humans, so on special occasions the rulers would return the favour by offering their blood to the gods. Priests were very important in Maya society as it was believed that they could communicate directly with the gods. They would tell the people when to plant crops, who to marry and what sacrifices they should make. The Maya people believed that the earth, which they called the Middleworld, was large and flat and resting on the back of a creature (like a turtle or crocodile). On the Middleworld grew a tree whose branches reached up into the heavens (the Upperworld) and whose roots grew down into Xibalba (the Underworld) which was guarded by gods of death who looked like jaguars. The Maya believed that after they died, their souls would travel through a series of caves and tunnels to Xibalba (which means 'place of fear') but the rulers and noblemen believed there was a chance of them getting to the Upperworld.

Maya Number System

They were one of only two cultures in the world to develop the concept of zero and this allowed them to develop a place value system where a zero could act as a place holder in large numbers. This enabled the Maya people to distinguish between numbers like 23 and 203, where the placement of the zero determines the value of the digit 2 as 200. This is a very important concept which many civilisations did not understand until much later than the Maya.

0	1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19

The Maya people used symbols to represent their numbers. The Maya people used just three symbols in their number system. These are thought to represent items that the Maya people might have first used to count with such as pebbles, sticks and shells. The Maya people used a base 20 number system, so after number 19 multiples of 20 were written above the bottom number. This is called a vigesimal positional number system.

Writing

The Maya people wrote books made of the bark from fig trees. The codices were written by professional scribes and contained information about astronomy, gods, war and history. Rather than having separate pages, the codices unfolded like a concertina. The Last Codices - Unfortunately, when the Spanish arrived and set to conquer the Maya, their priests burned as many Maya codices as they could find as they considered them to be the work of the devil. Three genuine Maya codices remain, and they were discovered in Europe.



These codices are named after the places they are kept. Maya hieroglyphic writing can be made up of syllabograms (representing sounds) or logograms (representing whole words). Logograms often resemble the thing that they represent, so it is easy for us to see what they mean, but others are more tricky.

Food


















For the Maya people, corn was life. It formed up to 80% of their diet. The Maya used chocolate in religious ceremonies, and they also mixed them with herbs to make medicines.



Key Vocabulary

Chac	Brought the rain needed to make crops grow. Created storms, thunder and lightning. Portrayed as a human with a curling snout and reptile fangs.	maize	A cereal grain, sometimes called corn.
Copan	An archaeological site of the Maya civilization.	Mesoamerica	A historical region and cultural area in North America.
Hunaphu and Xbalanque	Hero twins in Mayan Mythology.	Seven Macaw	A bird demon defeated by the Hero Twins of a K'iche (a Mayan myth)
Hurakan	God of wind, storm, and fire.	Shield Jaguar	A Maya warrior king
Itzamna	One of the creator gods. Inventor of writing. Patron of learning. Portrayed in human form as an old man with no teeth and a large nose	syllabogram	Signs used to write the syllables of words.
Ix Chel:	Wife of Itzamna. Goddess of childbirth, healing, weaving and the Moon. Portrayed in human form wearing a headdress of snakes entangled in her hair, and toes and fingers that looked like jaguar claws. Capable of causing floods and destruction.	The Dresden Codex	In the Royal Library collection in Dresden, Germany.
Kimi	The god of death, the Lord of the Maya Underworld (Xibalbá)	The Grolier codex	A fourth codex discovered in the 1960s, but historians cannot decide if it is real.
Lady Xook	One of the most powerful and prominent women in Maya civilization.	The Madrid Codex	Housed in the Madrid Archaeological Museum, Spain.
logograms	A sign or character representing a word or phrase.	The Paris Codex	Housed in the National Library of Paris, France.



																
Ancient Egypt	Mayans	The Shang Dynasty	Celts	Romans	Anglo-Saxons	Vikings	Riotous Royals	Christopher Columbus	Queen Elizabeth I	The Great Fire of London	Florence Nightingale	The Coming of the Railways West Byfleet	The Shah Jahan Mosque	Queen Elizabeth II Coronation	Moon Landing	History in the Locality
7,500BC	2600BC	1766 BC	750BC	AD43	AD449	793	1066	1492	1559	1666	1820	1888	1889	1953	1969	2012
Year 3	Year 5	Year 4	Year 3	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 4	Year 1	Year 1	Year 2	Year 2	Year 5	Year 3	Year 1	Year 1	Year 2