

History - Maya Civilisation

Who were the Ancient Maya?

The Maya were one of the great civilisations of the Americas. But there was not one single Maya empire. The Maya were spread among a group of city-states that were independent and ruled separately, but shared a common culture. Maya city-states shared similar religious beliefs, social structures, and building styles to other Mesoamerican (modern day Mexico and Central America) cultures like the Olmec and Aztec, but each civilisation was unique.



The Maya believed that there were three different parts to the universe: the sky, the Earth, and an underworld filled with water. Their religion was polytheistic, which means that they believed in many gods and goddesses. They believed that these gods and goddesses lived in the sky.

Timeline

Evolution of Maya Culture

Olmec	1200 - 1000 BC
Early Pre-Classic Maya	1800 - 900 BC
Middle Pre-Classic Maya	900 - 300 BC
Late Pre-Classic Maya	300 BC - 250 AD
Early Classic Maya	250 - 600 AD
Late Classic Maya	600 - 900 AD
Post Classic Maya	900 - 1500 AD
Colonial Period	1500 - 1800 AD
Independent Mexico	1821 AD - Present

Civilisation	the level of development at which people live together peacefully in communities.
Hieroglyphics	a writing system that uses pictures and symbols instead of letters and words. ... Each symbol in hieroglyphic writing is called a hieroglyph.
Mesoamerica	the region extending from central Mexico through Central America which produced a set of culturally related civilizations .
Sacrifice	a loss or something you give up, usually for the sake of a better cause.
Stelae	a stone or wooden slab, mostly taller than it is wide, that is erected for commemorative purposes.
Kingdom	a country or place whose ruler is a king or queen.
Haab'	a solar calendar that had 18 months of 20 days each. There were five extra "unlucky" days in the 19th month to get to total of 365 days in a year. They numbered the days in the month from 0 to 19.
Chichen Itza	a large Mayan city famous for a large, pyramid temple built by the Maya civilization.

Significant Dates

Beginnings 2000BC	Ceremonial centres were built in modern-day Guatemala and the Yucatan. This marks the very beginnings of the Maya Civilisation.
Start of Classical Period 250AD	Time period of the Maya's largest achievements in culture. Mathematics as well as astronomy were adopted and refined by intellectuals, a writing system was created, architecture was at its most advanced and technology supported complex cities and fertile crops.
Growth 600AD	The Maya population reached five million or more. This caused resources to be outstripped. Deforestation and erosion of the land ensued, and made the land less fertile.
Drought Period 840AD	The area experienced a long term drought which jump started the downfall of the Maya civilisation. The drought accompanying the erosion of the soil caused crop failure.
End of Classical Period 900AD	End of the classical phase of the Maya Civilisation. From this point on, the society never returned to its full glory.
Repercussions of Drought 909AD	The last date inscribed by the Maya. This year marks the end of the Maya. Due to extended drought periods over the past century as well as famine, epidemics and internal warfare, population steeply declined until the end of the civilisation.

Social Structure

The ancient Maya social class structure may be briefly stated as follows.

The top was constituted by priests and kings along with royal families who lived in the palaces.

Then were the wealthy nobles placed on the second level.

Commoners and officers were at the next level in the classes.

The bottom of the structure included the servants and workers. In the end were slave who lived a miserable life.

Key Facts

How did they live?

The Maya society was based in what is known as Mesoamerica.

The Maya empire was organised into city states; each city state was ruled by a different noble family.

Maya people lived in settlements with a central temple/pyramid as a focal point.

Maya city states traded with each other - sometimes using cocoa beans as money.

What were they famous for?

Being expert mathematicians and astronomers.

Why are they significant?

They used their studies to create calendars.

The Maya also created a writing system called glyphs. Each symbol represented a word or sound.

They built many large buildings, pyramids and palaces for their gods and their kings.