

LOST CIVILIZATIONS: THE MAYA CIVILIZATION



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CONTENTS

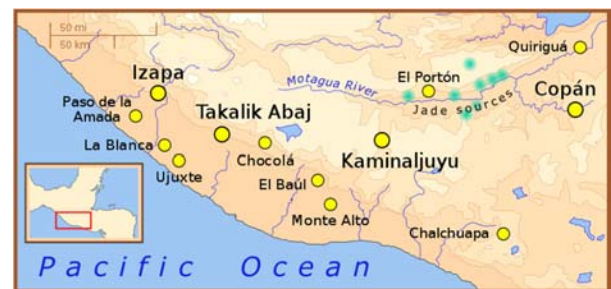
- Investigation Of Maya Civilization..... 2**
- Beginning Of The Maya&Preclassic Period 3**
- Classic Period.....5**
- Postclassic Period&Spanish Conquest 6**
- Agricultural Products and Applications In Maya.....7**
- Public Administration In Maya.....8**
- Religion&Maya Belief.....9**

BEGINNING OF THE MAYA & THE PRECLASSIC PERIOD

Maya civilization was a *Mesoamerican* civilization which located in southeastern Mexico, all of Guatemala and Belize, and the western portions of Honduras and El Salvador. They excelled at agriculture, mathematics, astronomy, writing, art and architecture.

The first mayan settlements established in the Soconusco region of the Pacific Coast around 1800 BC. They settled down in an arable area so they started to grow crops like corn, beans, squashes and cassava. In addition to agriculture, they also displayed more advanced activities like building temples and pyramids.

They developed their first civilization during this period. Villages began to grow to form cities. " Nakbe " in Petén department of Guatemala is the earliest city in Maya lowlands. Monochrome vessels, narrow necked jars, multicolored bowls were found during the archeological excavations. This indicates to a development in pottery and fine arts. Besides, they built a pyramid called " Structure 1 " which is one of the most impressive and largest buildings in the region.



El Mirador, in the northern Peten, was one of the greatest cities that have ever been built in pre-colombian Americas. El Mirador means " The Lookout " in Spanish because of the tall pyramids. It covered nearly 16 square kilometers and reached a population up to 100,000 during its reign. The city had its own structure style including tall pyramids and monumental architecture which are 10 to 72 meters high. Also Tikal - a city which is going to be the center of the Maya civilization in the upcoming years - was not as large as Tikal but it kept developing and became a significant city around 350 BC.

On the other hand, in the highlands Kaminaljuyu was an emergent city also Takalik Abaj and Chocholá were the two important cities of Pacific Coastal plain.

BEGINNING OF THE MAYA & THE PRECLASSIC PERIOD

Also, pottery began to show up with basic forms and different designs. Pottery is a heavy and fragile material so it is not often used by nomads. Accordingly, it refers to a long term settlement.



Chocolate Vessel Maya (Pacific Coast or Piedmont, Guatemala) Created: Late Preclassic Period, 300-100 BCE

During the evolution of Maya, Olmec culture and civilization is a thing to consider. They thrived along Mexico's gulf coast from approximately 1200-400 B.C. They influenced many important Mesoamerican cultures that came after them like Maya and Aztec. Maya and Olmec has some common points in terms of language and astronomy. For example the Long Count calendar - which is used by many mesoamerican civilizations- and the number zero may have been devised by the Olmecs. Although the origins of Long Count calendar is controversial, the first idea mentions that it is likely to be invented by Olmecs and developed by Mayans. Because 6 artifacts with the earliest Long Count calendar dates were found outside the Maya borders and three of this them were found in Olmec homeland. Besides, the second idea says that Olmecs declined before the earliest Long Count calendar date artifact.

Maya derived a number of religious and cultural rituals from Olmecs. For instance, they witnessed this animal's habits and they adopt the jaguar as an authoritative and martial symbol.

Also early evidence of Maya carved hieroglyphic text on stone monument was found at El Portón round 400 BE.

Because of the perception created about, it is a fact accepted by everybody that they collapsed for an unknown reason. Actually, it is not widely known but there are 2 such collapses in Maya. First one is the end of the Preclassic Period and the other one is the *Classic Maya Collapse*. First one refers to the abandonment of the early Maya preclassic states such as El Mirador around 100 AD.

CLASSIC PERIOD

The classic period, which began around 250 AD, was the golden era of the Maya. They grew to 40 cities including Tikal, Uaxactún, Copán, Bonampak, Dos Pilas, Calakmul, Palenque and Río Bec. The largest cities had populations numbering 50,000 to 120,000 and the total population was approximately 2,000,000. With the increase of population, urbanism arose. Also, large-scale constructions like plazas, palaces, temples and pyramids were found during the excavations of Maya sites. Besides, recordings of the monumental inscriptions indicates a fascinating intellectual and artistic development.



Early Classic, Maya Stela, A.D. 300–500

In 629, B'alaj Chan K'awiil, a son of the Tikal king K'inich Muawaan Jol II, was sent to found a new city at Dos Pilas (Petexbatún region). Later on, he was captured by the Calakmul king Yuknoom Ch'een II and served as an ally of Calakmul.

As previously, Classic Maya influenced by their western neighbours: *Teotihuacans*. Tikal and Calakmul were the important cities of the era. Power of Maya concentrated on these 2 cities. They develop systems of vassals and allies. Other cities entered these networks and they gained prestige from their relationship with Tikal and Calakmul. Consequently, in AD 378, Teotihuacans attacked Tikal and deposed their rulers. They did the same thing to the nearby cities and established a new Teotihuacan backed dynasty. This action was led by Siyaj K'ak', which arrived at Tikal before the attack (around early 378).



CLASSIC PERIOD

In southeast, Copán was an important city. It was founded by their first king K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo'. He had a strong relationship with Petén and Teotihuacan. With these ties, he had a supporter in terms of politics. They come to a head with the artistic and cultural development during the rule of Uaxaclajuun Ub'aah K'awiil. Despite his success, his reign ended catastrophically. He was captured by his vassal, K'ak' Tiliw Chan Yopaat king of Quiriguá, and decapitated in public. It is a theory that they might be backed up by Calakmul. Because Calakmul wanted to weaken a powerful ally of their great rival Tikal.

At the other regions, Palenque and Yaxchilan were the most powerful cities in the Usumacinta region. In the highlands, Kaminaljuyu was persisting its power in the Valley of Guatemala by 300. In the north, Cobá was an important city.



CLASSIC MAYA COLLAPSE

During the 9th century AD, there was a major political collapse which we can see from the abandonment of the cities and the ending of the dynasties. There isn't an accepted universal theory that can explain this collapse but overpopulation, collapse of trade routes, invasion, drought or other climate changes might have caused this collapse. The northern cities of Chichen Itza and Uxmal showed increased activity and this is the thing that makes the classic Maya collapse strange. Also, northern Yucatán Peninsula continued to be inhabited and individual rule was replaced.

Moreover, regime may have caused this collapse. Because social organization was based on the ritual authority and ruler's actions were limited and this caused some systematic problems. In the southern Yucatan and central Peten kingdoms declined. In the upcoming years, most of the Maya area were all abandoned. Cities stopped their activity one by one and Mesoamerican trade routes shifted to Peten.

CLASSIC PERIOD

SPANISH INVASION AND ITS RESULTS

In 1511, a dozen of Spanish warriors made landfall on the coast of Yucatan.. They were captured and sacrificed by a Maya lord but 2 of them managed to escape.

From 1517 to 1519, three Spanish expeditions explored the Yucatan coast as a preparation to the invasion. During these expeditions they engaged in a number of battles with the Maya inhabitants. After the Aztec capital fell to the Spanish in 1521, they arrived in Soconusco in 1523. Afterwards, the K'iche' capital fell to Alvarado in 1524.

Spanish were invited to Iximiche, the capital city of the Kaqchikel Maya, as allies. But good relations did not last, the city was abandoned a few months later. This was followed by the fall of the Mam Maya capital. They finally completed the conquest of the northern portion of peninsula in 1546. After the conquest, the only independent Maya kingdom was Peten Basin. In 1697 last independent Maya city "Tayasal " fell to the Spanish and the conquest completed.



After the Spanish conquest, the basic Mesoamerican diet of maize and beans continued. Traditional crafts and trade in local products continued long after the conquest. Also, Maya beliefs and language continued despite the effects of Catholic missionaries.

In conclusion, Maya culture proved resistant to change and it was a firm footing. Such that, we can see its effects today.

Agricultural Products And Applications In Maya

Because of the large populations of the Maya cities, agriculture was advanced and sophisticated. This is a big mystery if we consider the lands they inhabited like large rainforests, swampy areas and mountainous hillsides. They had to engineer a variety of Mayan farming methods due to unfavorable environmental conditions. They grew crops like maize (corn), squash, beans, chili peppers, and cacao (cocoa), which is used to make chocolate.

1) Slash And Burn Agriculture

This is a method which is enforced to a area where all the trees and other plants are cut down. Then they burn the entire area and plant in the rich ash that resulted. After 2-3 years, they deplete the soil and ash and lie fallow for 5 to 15 years. Than they moved to a new area and repeat the process. Some archeologists realized that slash and burn technique alone is not enough for feeding the large populations of the Maya cities. So they started to look for new techniques that maya might have used (like shifting or swidden agriculture).

2) Raised Bed Farming

Many Mayan regions had swampy areas where it was hard to crop. As a solution to this difficulty they started to create raised beds alongside canals. They created these farm areas by digging the mud from the bottom and placing it on the top of the woven reeds which are 2 feet above the water level. Between the beds, they were water lilies which prevented the water from drying up. Each field provided 2-3 crops a year so we can say that this method is very productive.

3) Terrace Farming

Because of the vast region that Maya was spread, some citites had to cope with the hilly lands and mountainous areas while others had acces the level lands. Mayan cities located near hilly areas turned their disadvantage to a advantage by creating terraces along the slopes of the hills. They divided the hillside into small fields and lined them with a wall at the border. These walls reduced water runoff and helped farmers to prevent erosion.

These farms were watered by using canals constructed by Mayans. In conclusion, these terraces made the most productive use of mountainous or hilly lands. Also their irrigation system was a way to water most efficiently.

Besides the 3 main methods above, farmers are encouraged to plant trees that provided economic benefit for them as food or firewood like cacao and gum trees. Moreover, they used the wild and they looked for tubers, roots and berries they could eat.

Public Administration In Maya

The Ancient Maya Civilization involved a large number of city states and each city state had its own independent government. Rulers thought to have been god-like and Maya people believed that the king was an intermediary between the people and god. The leaders of the Maya were called the "halach uinic" or "ahaw", meaning "lord" or "ruler".

Also there were powerful councils of leaders who ran the government and were chosen from the class of nobles. Lesser lords were called the "batab" and military leaders were called the "nacom".

Priests

Religion was a part of Maya daily life so priests had the right to comment on administration. The kings of the Maya often came to the priests for advice on what to do in a crisis and to get predictions of the future. They had an influence on how the king ruled. In some ways the king was considered a priest.

Laws

Maya had strict laws. Crimes such as murder, arson, and acts against the gods were often punished with death. If it was determined that the crime was an accident, you apologize or the victim of the crime forgives you, they reduce the punishment.

If you broke a law, you will be judged on a trial where all the local leaders or nobles served as judge. During this trial, the judge would review evidence and listen to witnesses. After these, if you found guilty you will be punished immediately. If a noble was found guilty of a crime, they were often punished even more severely than a commoner.

- The position of king was usually inherited by the oldest son. If there wasn't a son then the oldest brother became king. However, there were also many cases of women rulers like Lady of Tikal, Lady Yohl Ik'nal, Lady Beastie, Lady Six Sky and Lady Ik' Skull.
- Commoners were not supposed to see or talk to him directly. Also they were forbidden from wearing the clothing of nobles.



The queen known as Lady K'abel is shown in ceremonial headdress on a 9-foot-tall limestone monument dubbed Waka Stela 34. (The Cleveland Museum of Art)

KINGS OF MAYA CIVILIZATION

B'alaj Chan K'awiil
 Ha' K'in Xook
 Itzam K'an Ahk II
 K'ak' Tiliw Chan Yopaat
 K'inich Janaab' Pakal
 K'inich Yat Ahk II
 K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo'
 K'inich Yo'nal Ahk I
 Uaxaclajuun Ub'aah K'awiil
 Yo'nal Ahk III
 Yuknoom Ch'een II
 Yuknoom Yich'aak K'ahk'

Religion And Maya Blief

The lives of Maya centered around their religion and gods of nature. In time, religion become a very important thing in Mayan daily life.

Although they believe a lot of nature god, they considered some of them more powerful.

Maya Gods (these are according to the the work of Diego de Landa, a Spanish bishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Yucatán.)

- **Bacab:** The old god of the interior of the earth and of thunder, sky-carrier, fourfold.
- **Can Tzicnal:** The Bacab of the north, associated with the color white.
- **Hobnil:** Bacab of the east.
- **Hazanek:** Bacab of the south.
- **Zac Cimi:** Bacab of the west.
- **Chaac Uayab Xoc:** A fish god and the patron of fishermen.
- **Ixtab:** Goddess of suicide, always represented with a rope around her neck.
- **Balon Ts'akab (Dzacab):** Also known by the name " Huracan "(similar to our word hurricane). His name means " one leg ". He is the lightning god, patron of the harvest, seeds, storms, wind and fire. According to their belief, he has the authorization to make a great flood if Maya angered the gods.
- **Chaac:** the god of storms and rain. He had a lightning axe that he used to strike clouds to produce rain and storms.



- Priests were responsible from keeping people in favor of gods and performing religious rituals.
- According to their afterlife belief, the mean gods will torment them while they are travelling through a dark underworld.
- There are some Mayan texts that describes the religious ceremonies and beliefs of the Maya. These books are called codices. The primary surviving books are the *Madrid Codex*, the *Paris Codex*, and *Dresden Codex* as well as a writing called the *Popol Vuh*. These sources are helping us to understand the Maya belief.

Maize god and Itzamna

Itzamna: The founder of maize and cacao as well as writing and medicine. Once mentioned as the father of the Bacabs

Religion And Maya Blief

Human sacrifice was a popular way to pray for god among Maya people. However, not all of the rituals were related to human sacrifice.

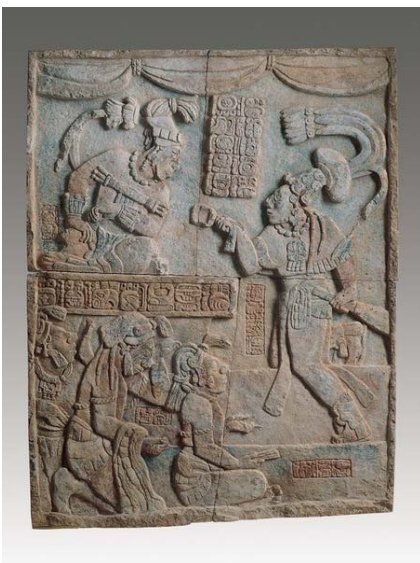
Bloodletting

It is the spilling of blood as a practice of sacrifice. They used this ritual to communicate with gods and ancestors. Both men and women of royal lineages were expected to perform these rituals. Maya kings and queens would participate in varying forms of bloodletting, even making sacred tools to perform the ritual. Blood was usually taken from different parts of the body with specialized tools designed to produce more blood and perhaps more pain as well. The tools were typically made of different materials to show their religious significance.

These ceremonies were performed on the set dates like the beginning or ending of a calendar cycle. This ceremony may also be executed when a king ascend to throne or at an important event (including births, deaths, marriages and wars.) that occurred in king's or queen's life.

Human Sacrifice

These sacrifices were performed in many ways, but there were three methods that were most common. The first method was decapitation. The next method was removing the heart from the living person. The final, most popular, method was to throw a living person into a *cenote* (it is a natural pit, or sinkhole, resulting from the collapse of limestone bedrock that exposes groundwater underneath), or natural well, as an offering to the gods.



This carved limestone relief, dated 23 August 783 CE, depicts three scribes being presented as prisoners to a Maya ruler.

To the Maya, death and sacrifice were spiritually linked to the concepts of creation and rebirth. In the Popol Vuh book, the god Tohil asks for human sacrifice in exchange for fire. These sacrifices were often carried out by priests and/or nobles, especially the king. Their reason to sacrifice people was the same with bloodletting ceremony.

Children were sometimes used as sacrificial victims at such times.

