

# Mayan Culture



A long time ago, around 2500 BCE, an ancient tribe of Central American Indians called the Olmecs settled in the rainforests of the Yucatan Peninsula of Central America. In this same region of Latin America other native peoples; such as the Zapotec, Mixtec

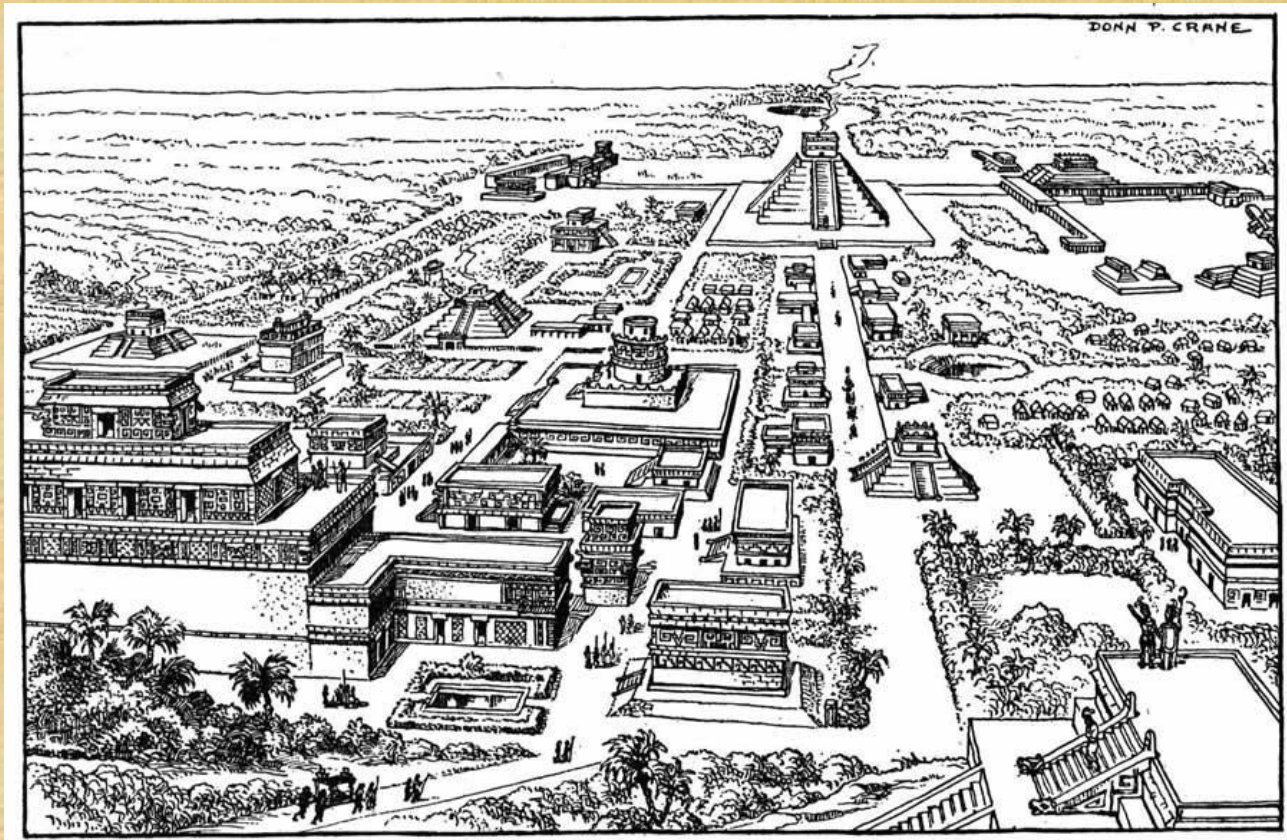
About two thousand years later, around 400 BCE, a new people suddenly appeared. These people were called the Maya. No one knows where they came from, but they arrived with amazing skills. They were an advanced civilization. They soon took over the Yucatan Peninsula of Central America.



**The Maya were very clever people. Their system of mathematics was among the most sophisticated in the ancient world.**

**Like the ancient Romans, the Mayas were master builders.**

**Unlike the ancient Romans, the ancient Mayas did not have metal tools. Their tools were made of stone, bone, and wood. Yet they built beautiful structures, huge cities, and excellent roads - roads that connected the many hundreds of cities that made up the Maya world.**



**Around 900 CE, the Maya cities were abandoned. A few people continued to live in the cities, but mostly, the cities were empty. The people had, for the most part, disappeared, gone somewhere else. Those who remained were unable or unwilling to repair the magnificent roads and buildings. The great Maya cities fell into ruin.**

**To this day, nobody knows where the Maya people came from before they arrived in the Yucatan Peninsula, and nobody knows why they left or where they went when most of the Maya people abandoned their cities and disappeared from the Yucatan Peninsula. That's why the Maya are sometimes referred to as "the mysterious Mayas".**

# Gods of Nature

The Mayas worshipped the gods of nature every day. Worshiping their gods was a huge part of their daily life.

Some of their gods included the God of Rain, Lady Rainbow, the God of Maize (corn), and of course, the God of Sun.

Without the help of these important gods, there would be no crops and everyone would starve.

# Afterlife

The Mayas believed in an afterlife. Commoners buried their dead inside their homes, under the floor. That way, they could live with their ancestors and keep their ancestors easily posted on their daily life. The Mayas believed they would be compensated. If they had a rough time or a rough life, this would be made up to them in their afterlife.

Nobles were buried in tombs.

# The Underworld

Maya religion was far more complicated than the simple worship of gods of nature. The Maya world was composed of 3 layers - the Heavens, the Earth, and the Underworld, sometimes called the Otherworld or the Place of Awe.

The Mayas conducted many ceremonies to keep the demons, creatures and gods in the Underworld, where they belonged.

# Masks

During certain religious ceremonies, priests dressed up like jaguars. Priests wore scary masks as they faced the inhabitants of the Underworld. Priests wanted to present themselves as equally scary and powerful.



# Mirrors

All of the men, but none of the women, used mirrors. In the ancient Maya world, looking into a mirror was an act of courage. The Maya believed that monsters from the Place of Awe could reach through the mirror, and yank you into the Otherworld.

# Powerful Leaders of Religion

Religion was at the heart of nearly all Maya activities. The Mayas believed in a great many gods and goddesses. They believed their priests could talk to the gods. That gave the priests incredible power.

The priests, along with the leaders in each city-state, were the most powerful people in the Maya civilization. Priests decided nearly everything in the Maya daily life. They decided when to plant, when people could marry, marry, and whom to sacrifice.

# Palaces

The Mayas built palaces for their rulers. One noble family ruled each city.

Each city had a palace built for that city's ruler. The job of ruler was hereditary. When one ruler died, his son took over. Typically, there was one palace per city.

The Palace was often built around a central garden or court for protection and privacy.

# Maya Temples

Temples were places of worship, and home to the many priests of the Maya civilization. At the foot of the temple was typically where the Mayas placed their ball courts.

Like the palaces, temples had a central courtyard offering privacy to those who lived there.

Pyramids were sometimes used as tombs for the royals, as well as for other purposes, but temples were never used as tombs. Temples were homes.

# Chichen Itza



# Uxmal



# Kabah



The most famous structure at Kabah is the "Palace of the Masks", the façade decorated with hundreds of stone masks of the long-nosed rain god Chaac.