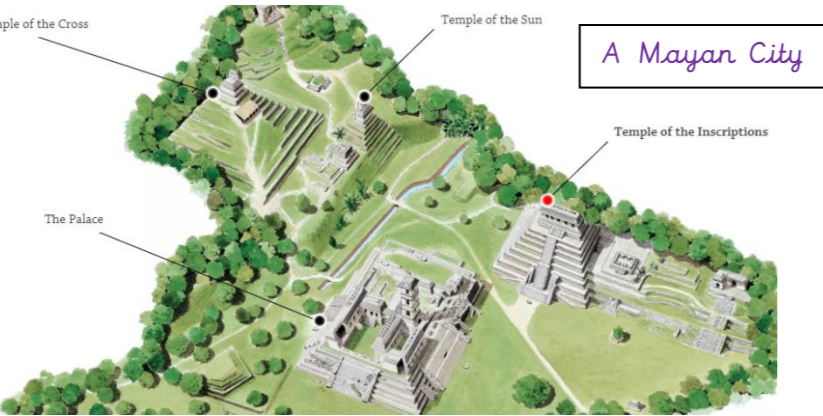


Mexico and the Maya - Fact Sheet



The first **Mesoamerican** civilisation to develop **writing**, the Maya developed a sophisticated culture of city states with fine monumental buildings and characteristic stepped pyramids.



The Maya civilization existed for over 1500 years

Maya Facts:

1. The Maya civilisation extended from what is now **South East Mexico through Central America**.
2. This area included highland and lowland **settlements** and a variety of **climate zones**. **Crops** grown in the lowlands were **traded** for mineral ores and rocks from the mountainous areas.
3. Although the Maya had **metal-working skills**, metal ores were scarce. Mayans used **stone tools** to carve the limestone that they used for their buildings.
4. The Maya did not use wheels or pulleys for their building projects. They did not have draught animals capable of heavy labour. **Building materials were transported by human porters or canoes**.
5. Archaeological evidence suggests that the Mayan settlement in **Mesoamerica** probably dates from the third millennium BC. The Mayans of the classic period c200-900 CE adopted many aspects of the earlier Olmec culture and were also influenced by surrounding cultures such as that of the great city of **Teotihuacan**.
6. Maya religion was extremely **bloodthirsty**, demanding human sacrifices and blood-letting rituals. The Maya believed in an **afterlife** and that those who were sacrificed, as well as those killed in war and women who died in childbirth, went to 'the place of misty sky'.
7. Maya society was formed of a number of **city states each with their own ruler**. Each city was surrounded by rural settlements.
8. At the top of Maya society was the **King and Royal family** who were believed to be closely linked to the gods. An educated elite of scribes, priests and nobles formed the **ruling class**. They occupied the finest buildings in the city.
9. The Mayans were sophisticated **mathematicians** who made use of the number zero. They used base 20 in their calculations. They were keen **astronomers** who were able to predict solar eclipses. Their complex **calendar** system was one of the most accurate of the ancient world.
10. No one knows for sure why the Maya civilisation went into **decline**. Possible explanations involve the overuse and exhaustion of farming land, prolonged drought, misrule, warfare and disease.



The Maya worshipped **many gods**. They believed the gods could change themselves to animal and human shapes. Priests performed ceremonies and sacrifices to keep the gods happy.



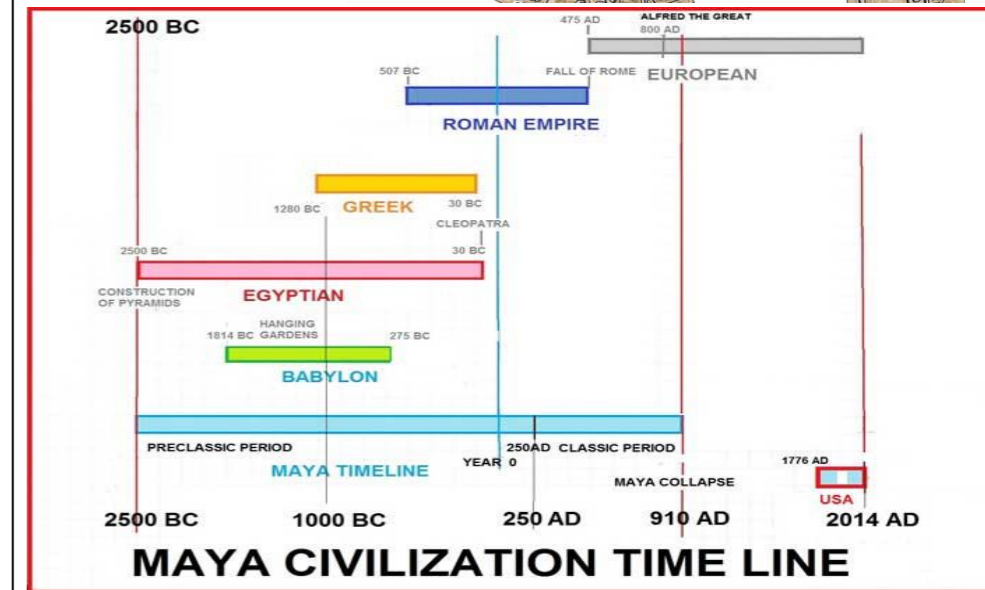
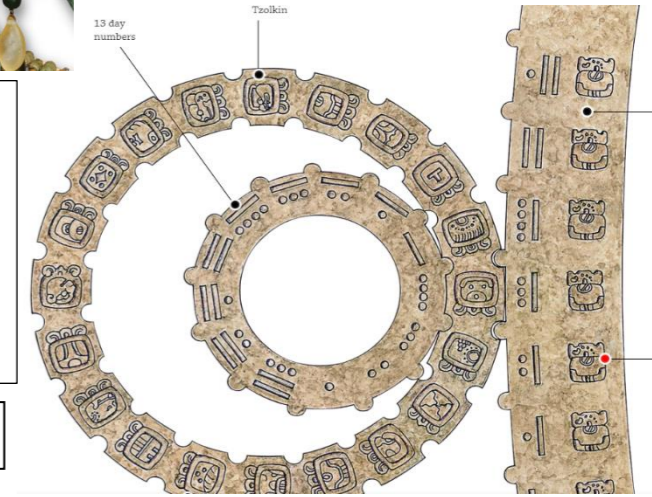
The Maya invented long distance weapons such as, **bow** and arrow, **blow gun**, slings and throwing **spears**.



The Maya produced **fine art** using materials such as: stone, Jade, wood and ceramics. The pieces of art help inform us of what their life was like.

The Maya were advanced in their use of **mathematics** and renowned for the accuracy of their **calendar**.

Maya Calendar.



Did you know?

- The Maya made books called **codices** out of paper bark. Unfortunately the Spanish conquistadors destroyed most of these codices in an attempt to stamp out native religion and only four survive today.
- Maya **pyramids** were originally covered in plaster and painted red.
- The **first date on the Maya calendar** equates to the 11 August 3- 114 BC.
- The Maya tied boards to their babies' heads to produce a **flat forehead**. They also tried to make their babies cross-eyed! Big noses were also considered beautiful.
- The Maya played a complex **ball game** with a rubber ball which had to be manoeuvred through high stone hoops to score. Historians are not sure whether the losing or the winning team was sacrificed after the match!
- The Maya **pyramid at Chichen-Itza** has 365 steps. It is positioned so that at the spring and autumn equinoxes shadows appear to show the plumed serpent God Kukulcan descending the stairs.

Warriors spent their life training to be better warriors. It was important to be a good warrior because the Maya cities were often at war with each other. They only fought at night a truce was set up at night.