

MAYANS 12,000BC – 1,000AD

Who were the Mayans?

The Maya civilisation began long ago in a place called 'Mesoamerica'. This huge area is made up of Mexico and part of Central America.

Priests: The Priests were the most important members of Mayan society. They were bought gifts and other Maya would work for them for free.

Rulers: The most important family; they ruled the city and lived a life of luxury. They might lose their place if the city was defeated in a war.

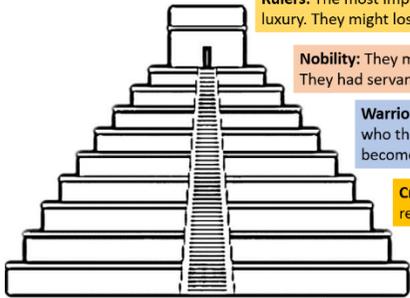
Nobility: They might have jobs as military leaders or business leaders. They had servants to work for them. They could read and write.

Warriors: Well-respected in society- rank was determined by who their father had been. If captured in war they might become a slave or even be sacrificed!

Craftsmen: Created art or ran businesses but could not read or write.

Farmers: Lived outside the city and were the biggest group in society. They had very hard lives of manual labour.

Slaves: The least important people in society; often captured in war, orphans or rule-breakers. They had no rights and might be used as human sacrifice.



What did the Mayans believe in?

The Mayas believed in many gods, each representing a different aspect of life. Communities made regular offerings to them, in the form of animal (and sometimes human) sacrifices. They believed the Earth had the form of a giant turtle that floated on an endless ocean and that the sky was held up by four mighty gods called Bacabs. The sky was made up of 13 levels. Those who were sacrificed or who died in battle went to one of the top levels. Those who died of natural causes went to Xibalba, the shadowy underworld, which had nine levels.

Where did they live?

Who was Frederick Catherwood?



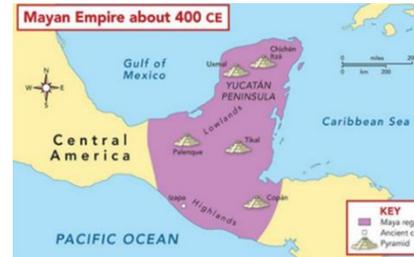
Born: 27 February 1799
Died: 27 September 1854

Frederick Catherwood was a British artist and architect. He was best known for his detailed drawings of the ruins of the Maya Civilisation.

In 1839 Frederick travelled to Central America with an American Explorer, John Lloyd Stevens. They wanted to see the ruins of Copan. Photography had only just been invented so drawings by artists were still more common than photographs to make a visual record of something. They documented the ruins and went on to discover many more, resulting in the publication of a book that became a bestseller.

Mayan cities

The Maya erected hundreds of ceremonial cities in the rainforests of Mesoamerica (the region of Mexico and Central America once occupied by the Maya, Aztecs, and related cultures). These cities were designed in a similar pattern. There was a palace for the ruler, a plaza for the marketplace, and several giant stone step pyramids. The cities shared the same culture, but remained separate from each other. There was never a single Mayan empire, but rather a widespread, interconnected civilization. The Mayan city of



Chichen Itza

Temple of the Warriors

A large, stepped pyramid with rows of columns sculpted to look like warriors, and other columns like serpents.

At the top of the staircase, in front of the temple at the top, is a chacmool.



chacmool - reclining man

Cenote Sagrado

This is a natural sink hole, 60 metres across and surrounded by cliffs 27 metres above the water.

Thousands of objects such as shell, jade, wood, obsidian (black glass), cloth and gold as well as human skeletons have been found at the bottom.

It was a place of pilgrimage as well as somewhere to sacrifice victims on occasion!



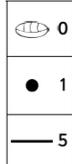
El Castillo is almost 23 metres tall.

It was built very precisely for astronomy and at a certain time and date, twice a year (March and September), the sun causes shadows to fall in a very specific way.

A 33 metre long snake appears, and as the shadows move it creeps down the steps until it reaches the huge serpents head carved in stone at the bottom.



What were the Mayan achievements?



Mayan Writing - The Maya were one of the five ancient civilisations to have independently developed a fully-fledged writing system. The earliest examples of Maya writing were found in San Bartolo, Guatemala and date to as far back as 300 BC.

The Maya people used a hieroglyphic writing system. Hieroglyphic writing consisted of signs or symbols called hieroglyphs or glyphs for short. The glyphs in Maya writing were either logograms (which represent words), or syllabograms (which represent a unit of sound). The syllabograms would then be combined within a single glyph block and read together to create a word. Codices written by Maya priests and scholars contained information about astronomy, religion and gods. However, only four known copies have survived to date.

Mayan Numbers - The numbers 1-19 are formed in a similar way to Roman Numerals. Different numbers are made by stacking the lines and lining up the circles on top.

Mayan Farming - Farming was really important to the Mayas. Most people grew their own crops in small fields. Despite their size, these fields were used to grow many kinds of crops at the same time, such as maize, beans, squash and chilli. If farmers grew more than they could eat, they traded the leftovers in markets. One reason the Mayas were so successful at farming was because they studied the stars and the weather. This meant they were able to create very detailed calendars which told them what time of year to plant crops and when they should harvest them.

