

THE MAYA

A Brief Overview

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Overview

The Maya is a Mesoamerican civilization that was initially established during the Pre-Classic period (c. 2000 BC to AD 250). According to the Mesoamerican chronology, many of the Maya cities reached their highest development during the Classic period (c. AD 250 to 900) and continued throughout the Post-Classic period until the arrival of the Spanish - Cortés landed on the Yucatan Peninsula, in Mayan territory, in 1519.



Map of Mesoamerican Cultures

Over their history, the Maya peoples never disappeared or radically declined, even with arrival of the Spanish conquistadores and the subsequent Spanish colonization of the Americas.

Today, the Maya and their descendants form sizable population groups throughout the Maya area and they maintain a distinctive set of traditions and beliefs that are consequential to the amalgamation of pre-Columbian and post-Conquest ideas and social cultures.

The Maya are especially noted for the only known written language of the pre-Columbian Americas, as well as for their art, architecture, mathematical ability, and their astronomical understanding and systems.

As keen astronomers, the Maya had mapped out the phases of celestial objects, especially the Moon and Venus; and many of their temples had doors, special openings, and other features which were aligned to specific celestial occurrences.

Although the archaeological record does not provide physical examples, Maya art shows that writing was done with quills and with brushes of animal hair. Codex-style writing was typically effected in black ink with red highlights - this gave rise to the Aztec name for the Maya territory as the land of "red and black".

A small number of Mayan documents survived destruction by the Spanish, and the most important include: the *Dresden Codex* now kept in the Sächsische Landesbibliothek Dresden; the *Madrid Codex* now kept in the American Museum in Madrid; and the *Paris Codex* now in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris. The *Dresden Codex* is a treatise on astronomy, thought to have been copied in the eleventh century AD from an original document dating from the seventh or eighth centuries AD.



The Maya Dresden Codex

Often, Maya writing, art, architecture, and astronomical representations have an unworldly reflection, which has caused much speculation as to their origins. Both on-world and off-world speculation and theories have been presented in abundance.



The Caracol building in Chichén Itza

However, no single definitive history of the Maya, supported with prima fascia evidence, has yet been fully accepted.

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