

How did the Ancient Maya compare to the Vikings?

Key Events	
2000 BC	The Maya civilisation comes into being in Central America.
300 BC	Cities, such as El Mirador, become large and powerful.
AD 900	Cities in the rainforest are abandoned due to an extensive drought . People move north to the highlands of Guatemala and the Yucatán.
AD 1000	Cities like Chichén Itzá (which has two temple pyramids) are still thriving.
AD 1500s	The Spanish arrive in South America and set out to destroy the remaining elements of Maya civilisation as part of their conquest.
AD 1839	American explorer and writer, John Lloyd Stephens, and British artist, Frederick Catherwood explore Copán and extensively document what they find, reigniting interest in the Maya civilisation . They go on to document other Maya cities, including Chichén Itzá.
AD 2014	The cities of Lagunita and Tamchén are rediscovered.



Religion

The Maya believed in and worshipped a number of different gods. They believed that the gods had a good side and a bad side and that the gods could help or hurt them. The Maya would dance, sing and sometimes make offerings of blood to the gods.

Priests were very important in Maya society as it was believed that they could communicate directly with the gods. They would perform different **rituals** during festivals or special ceremonies in order to appeal to the gods.

The Upperworld and the Underworld

The Maya people believed that the earth, which they called the Middleworld, was large and flat and resting on the back of a creature, such as a turtle or crocodile.

On the Middleworld grew a tree whose branches reached up into the heavens (the Upperworld) and whose roots grew down into Xibalba (the Underworld), which was guarded by gods of death who looked like **jaguars**.

Ordinary Maya people believed that, after they died, their souls would travel through a series of caves and tunnels to Xibalba. Rulers and noblemen believed that they had a chance of getting to the Upperworld.

Masks

The Maya used masks for a variety of reasons and occasions.

These included:

- to decorate the faces of the dead
- To be worn at important events
- To be worn during battle





Pok-ta-Pok

The game was played with a rubber ball in specifically-built arenas. The game was said to symbolise the battle between good and evil. The pok-ta-pok ball represents the paths of the Sun, Moon

Buildings in Maya Society

The Maya built great temples, palaces, and pyramids in their city centers. These were often mighty stone structures, over which wooden buildings and thatched roofs were often built.



Writing

The Maya writing system, used to write several different Maya languages, was made up of over 800 symbols called glyphs. Some glyphs were logograms, representing a whole word, and some were syllabograms, representing units of sound. They were carved onto stone buildings and monuments and painted onto pottery. Maya scribes also wrote books, called **codices**, made from the bark of fig trees. Only priests and noblemen would know the whole written language.



The Maya logogram for b'alam - jaguar

Maya Numbers

The Maya developed a complex number and counting system that was advanced for their time. They were one of only two cultures in the world to develop the concept of zero.



The Maya people used just three symbols in their number system. These are thought to represent items that the Maya people might have first used to count with, such as pebbles, sticks and shells.

The Maya used a base 20 number system, so after number 19, multiples of 20 were written above the bottom number.



Food

Maize was a very important crop that formed up to 80% of the Maya people's diets. They believed that the first humans were made from **maize** dough by the gods.

The Maya made a bitter chocolatey drink from **cacao beans** that was enjoyed by the rich and used for medicines and in ceremonies.

The beans were highly valued and even used as a form of money.

