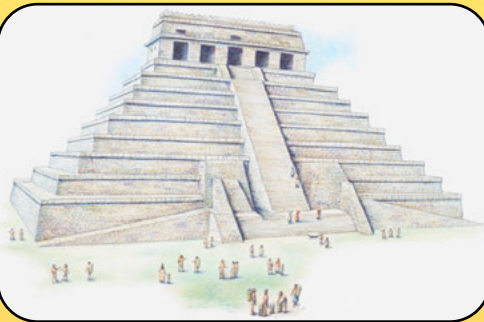
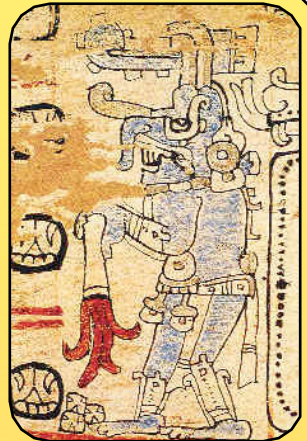


Mayan Religion

Religion was very important to the Maya. They believed in lots of different gods who controlled their lives. Each god was in control of a different area of life, such as maize, fire, storms or childbirth.

This picture shows Chac, the god of rain and water.



The Maya worshipped the gods at temples in the cities or in their homes. They had special ceremonies which were run by priests. Every twenty days, people gathered outside the temples to sing, dance, offer sacrifices and pray.

The Maya believed that you had to offer gifts to the gods to keep them happy. They offered food, drink and other gifts, such as flowers or precious stones. These were thrown down holy wells called cenotes for the gods.



Marigolds were often offered to the gods because they were thought to represent the sun.

Being a human sacrifice was considered to be a great honour. People who were sacrificed went straight to heaven.



The Maya also believed that unless they gave blood sacrifices to the gods, the sun would stop rising and the Earth would end.

They would offer human and animal sacrifices by pulling out hearts. They also made themselves (or captives) bleed by pulling out their fingernails or drawing spiky ropes through their tongues.

Temples were not just places of worship but were also tombs. Mayan leaders were buried in the pyramids. They were often buried with many objects or with sacrificed animals or slaves. This might have been to help them journey through the underworld to reach heaven.



Mayan rulers wore masks when they died to help them become gods in the afterlife.

Mayan Religion

What did the Maya believe?

The Maya believed in many different gods who each had control over a different aspect of life, such as the gods of rain, maize, childbirth, bees, wine, games and fire. These gods could control human events and change fates. As such, people consulted the gods on everything they did and prayed for help in their lives.



Chac, the rain god



A Mayan temple

How did the Maya worship?

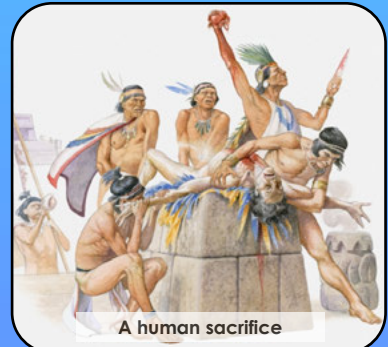
The Maya worshipped the gods in lots of different ways. They had special festivals run by the temple priests every twenty days where people would meet outside the temple to sing, dance and pray. The priests would wear large headdresses and scary masks to frighten any demons away. People also gave offerings and sacrifices of food, drink, flowers, precious objects and blood to the gods to keep them happy. They threw these offerings into a holy well called a cenote.

Why did the Maya offer blood to the gods?

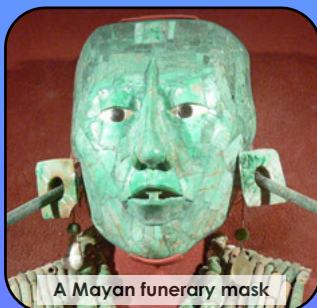
The Maya believed that unless they offered blood to the gods, the sun would stop rising every day and the world would end.

Sometimes this meant offering a human sacrifice. Humans sacrifices could be men, women or children. Slaves and captives often had their hearts cut out or their fingernails pulled off.

However, it was the richer Mayans who had more of a responsibility to give the gods blood. They would do this by pricking themselves with cactus thorns or by pulling a barbed rope through their tongues.



A human sacrifice



A Mayan funerary mask

What were Mayan temples like?

Mayan temples were pyramids. They were tall so that the tops were closer to heaven. Temples were the domains of the priests who would perform ceremonies in small, dark rooms. However, temples were also tombs. Mayan leaders would often have temples built as their burial ground. They would be buried with precious objects and human or animal sacrifices. They also wore special masks and jewellery that was thought to help them become gods in the afterlife.

What did Maya believe happened when you died?

The Maya believed that there was an underworld and a heaven. There were different levels of the underworld and different levels of heaven. The Maya believed that most people, including kings, nobles and priests, had to journey through the underworld to reach heaven and live with the gods. The underworld was a dark and terrifying place with frightening gods, scary demons and rivers of blood. The only people who went straight to heaven were those who had been sacrificed, those who died in childbirth or battle, and those who died playing a religious ball game called Pok-a-Tok.