

The Maya

Learning Objective:

To find out about the decline of the Mayan civilisation.

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Until quite recently, historians believed the Maya to be a peaceful people. However, they now know that there were many battles between city states. These battles were to try and gain captives for sacrifice, to gain control of trade routes or to gain power. Warriors were expected to be brave. It was considered an honour to be killed in battle.



Mayan warriors wore tunics, loincloths or fur costumes and often painted their faces or bodies. They used stone and wood to make spears, shields and other weapons.

This Mayan man is dressed as a warrior would have dressed in the first century. What can you see?



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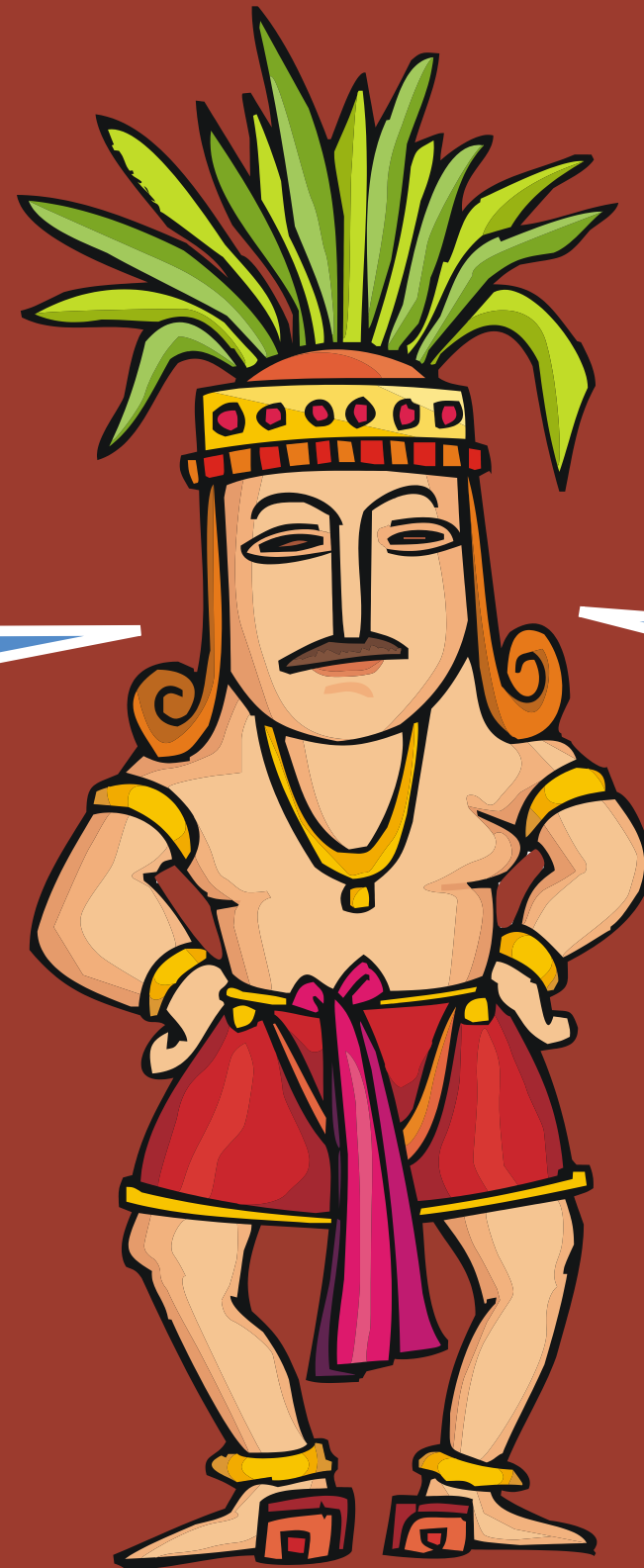
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The details of the battles between the city states were written on stone stelae in the cities, like this one. They told of great warriors and great battles, giving details of victories and defeats.

However, around the year 900 AD the records disappeared and the cities vanished from history. The cities were abandoned, not to be discovered again until the Spanish conquistadors arrived in the sixteenth century.

What do you think might have happened?



Why do you think a thriving civilisation might suddenly cease to exist?

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No one knows exactly why the great Mayan cities fell into decline. Which of these explanations do you think is most likely? Why?

Disease wiped everyone out.

The food ran out and everyone starved.

The Maya were conquered by neighbouring tribes.

Aliens invaded and took the Maya to outer space.

A great battle killed too many of the population for the civilisation to continue.

A natural disaster killed everyone.

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The Mayan civilisation didn't end completely. Small groups of Maya continued to live in the rainforests and volcanic mountains of Mesoamerica but the great cities were no more. These people kept the Mayan culture and traditions going and the Maya still live in the region today.