



# THE MAYA

People of the Jaguar



# Maya Territory

- ❖ The Maya civilization originated in the lowlands of Mexico and Central America.
- ❖ Maya villages are recorded as early as 1500 B.C.E., but the Classic Period of the Maya extended from 250 C.E. to 900 C.E.
- ❖ They may have had a population of over 10 million at the peak of their civilization.

# GOVERNMENT

✦ **Maya cities were ruled by kings who had absolute power over their subjects and established great dynasties.**

✦ **The king was the commander-in-chief, head of the civil administration and the high “priest”.**





# CITIES



◆ Stone living quarters, sacred buildings, and a royal residence were all grouped around a temple.

◆ The temple was a **STEPPED PYRAMID**, decorated with masks of divinities.



# By 500 B.C.E., Tikal became the first great Maya City.

🏛️ Tikal had a plaza and paved roads.

🏛️ At its peak, it had an urban population of 40,000 and a rural population of 50,000.



- Palenque



# Class Society



King or High Priest (ahaw)

Council (Priesthood) - often part of the Royal Family



Nobles



Merchants & Artisans



Commoners - Farmers (and Slaves)



# Slavery in the New World





♣ The Maya Empire included dozens of city states in the areas which are now: Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador

♣ Trade flourished between these cities as did conflicts.



# CLIMATE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

- ‡ The Maya lived in tropical zones of Mesoamerica.
- ‡ In addition to slash-and-burn agricultural techniques, they developed systems for terraced farming and irrigation.





The abundance of food and resources allowed their population to increase dramatically.



# **Well established trade routes allowed Maya to import luxury items from other cities**

- ◆ Each Region had exclusive resources:
  - The Highlands had granite and obsidian.
  - The Lowlands produced cotton, animal skins, feathers and beeswax.
  - The northern Yucatan provided salt
  - Jade was produced only in eastern Guatemala
  - Quetzal feathers could only be found in the Highland cloud forests
  - Cocoa needed the wet slopes of the west coast



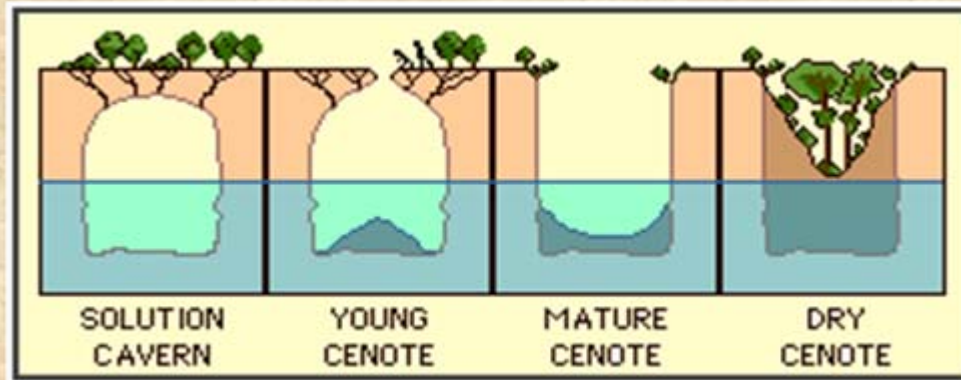


Much of the fresh water supply for the Maya came from cenotes



The placement of early Maya settlements follows cenote locations

# Stages in the Formation of a Cenote



- **SOLUTION CAVERN** - Naturally acidic groundwater seeping through cracks in the limestone bedrock dissolves areas of softer rock lying beneath the hard surface crust. Over time, this process creates large underground caverns roofed with only a thin layer of surface limestone.
- **YOUNG CENOTE** - As erosion continues, this thin roof eventually collapses, leaving an open, water-filled hole.
- **MATURE CENOTE** - Over thousands of years, erosion gradually fills the cenote with organic and mineral debris, reducing its depth. The Cenote of Sacrifice is currently in this stage.
- **DRY CENOTE** - As erosion continues, the cenote may completely fill, becoming a dry, shallow basin supporting trees and other vegetation.



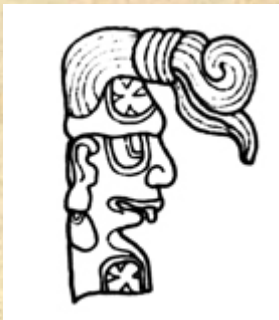
# Sacred Cenote at Chichen Itza



©Jeffrey Jay Foxx / NYC

# RELIGION

✦ Maya religion was based on Nature Gods, the most important of which were the gods of the sun, moon, rain and corn.



Sun God



Goddess of  
the Moon



Rain God



Corn God

✦ Priests were powerful figures in charge of rituals, and ceremonies communicating with the gods.

✦ Blood was often used in ceremonies to appease the gods and to restore harmony.






# Kukulcán - The feathered serpent



Henri Christopher Dunster

**The God of Culture**

# SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

-  The Maya were the most advanced society of pre-Columbian America.
-  They used their knowledge of astronomy in their planting cycles, festivals, and even in planning war.
-  Religion and science went hand-in-hand to the Maya.



**Traders needed a way to record merchandise sold and to compute its value.**

**📌 The Maya developed a system of mathematics that included the concept of zero.**



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVPOSvPNn28>




# The Maya Developed Three Separate Calendars:

 **The Ritual Calendar of 260 days**

 **The Civil Calendar of 365 days**

 **And the Long Count**

 **The Long Count will end on 2012 – to the Maya it meant the end of civilization, and the beginning of a glorious, new one.**

Maya glyph for day  
10 of the calendar.

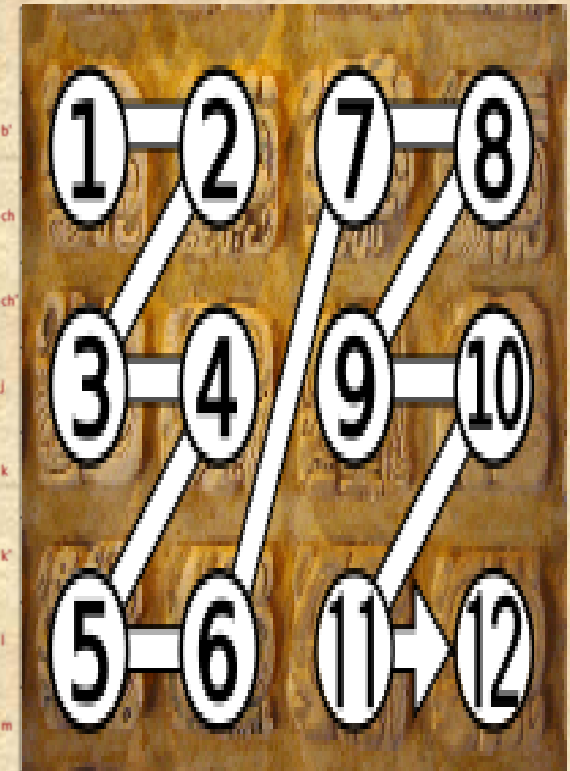




# Scribes Were Both Writers and Painters

☞ They developed a system of writing based on glyphs, and read in a specific pattern.

☞ Written records included information in genealogies, battles, medical treatments, the movement of the stars and calendars.



- [Cracking the Code](#)

**Few Mayan paintings have survived the humid jungle environment, but those that have, exemplify some of most beautiful and sophisticated works of Mesoamerica.**

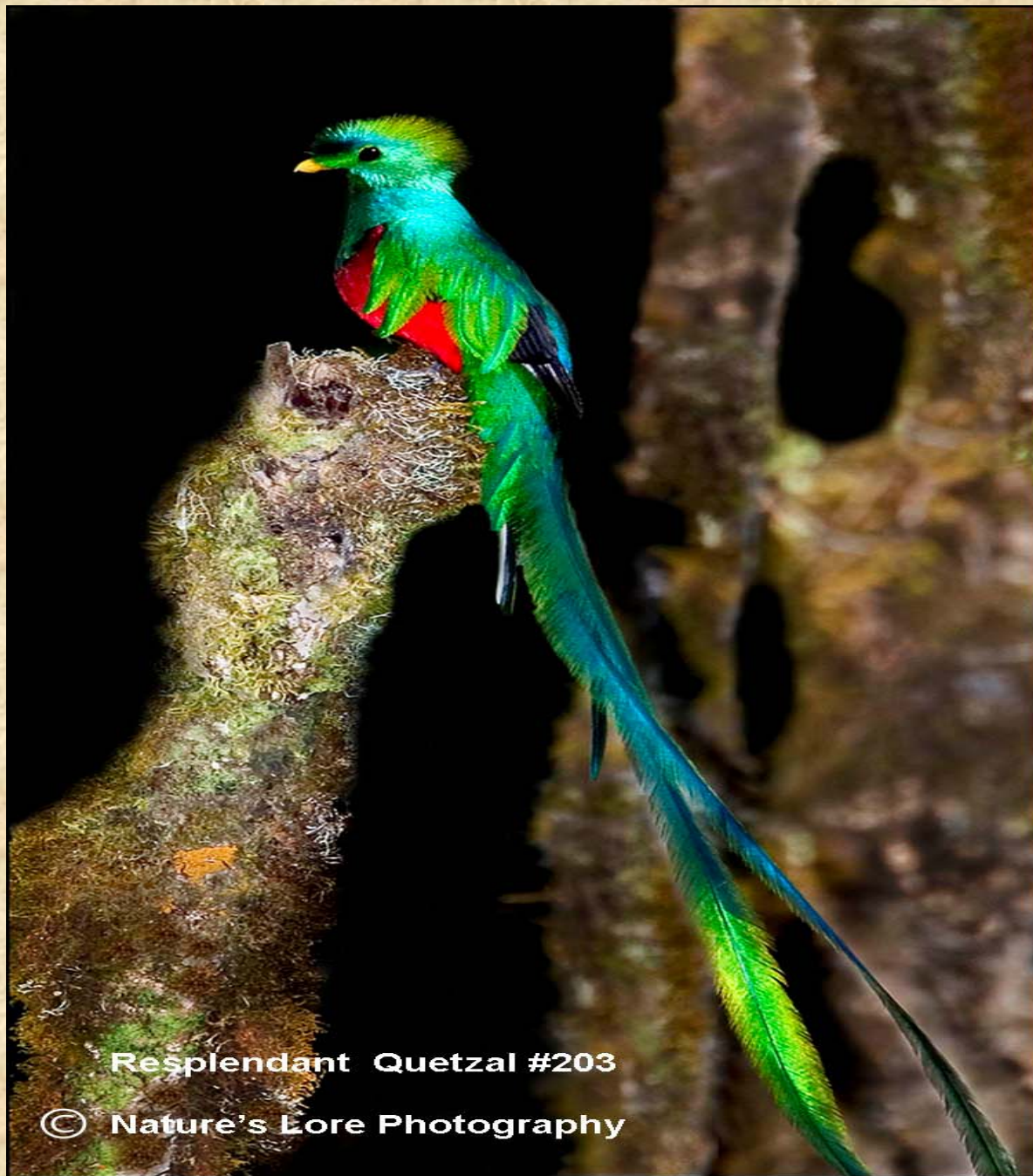




# ART AND MUSIC

**Artisans and craftsmen were an important part of Maya cities.**

- 🦋 Drums and pipe music accompanied festivals.**
- 🦋 Dance was a way to communicate with the gods**
- 🦋 Weaving was an important skill for women – they produced several different types of cloth and designs**
- 🦋 Basketwork and pottery were everyday items**
- 🦋 Feather-working decorated the headdresses and ceremonial robes of nobles**



**Only the elite were allowed to wear the beautiful feathers from the resplendent quetzal**

**Resplendant Quetzal #203**

**© Nature's Lore Photography**





carve designs on  
one have survived.

signed altars and thrones

## STELA

designs attached to  
pillars or stelae.



## **Precious Materials Were Used To Make Decorative Masks and Jewelry.**

◆ **Jade, considered more precious even than gold, was used in jewelry and in masks of the kings and the gods.**



◆ **These crafts were used by the royal class to display their power, and were sometimes used as offerings to the gods – thrown into the Sacred Cenote, or well, for example.**

# DAILY LIFE

- ◆ Families lived in extended groups with individual houses arranged around a central courtyard.
- ◆ Most citizens, whether in the cities or surrounding farms, awoke before dawn.
- ◆ Boys learned the skill of their father, with schools to train the elite of the nobility as scribes or warriors
- ◆ Girls were educated in domestic skills at the home.
- ◆ Clothing for men included loincloths plus robes to protect from the weather.
- ◆ Women's clothing consisted of a blouse and a skirt or a loose shift.
- ◆ Steam baths were used for cleanliness.

# Maya People Had a Unique Sense of Beauty

- ◆. Features that Maya found attractive might be viewed as hideous today.
- ◆ Both men and women displayed body art of tattoos and paint as well as lip and ear plugs made from jade, obsidian, shell and gold.



**Mayan Ruler**



**Mayan Noblewoman**



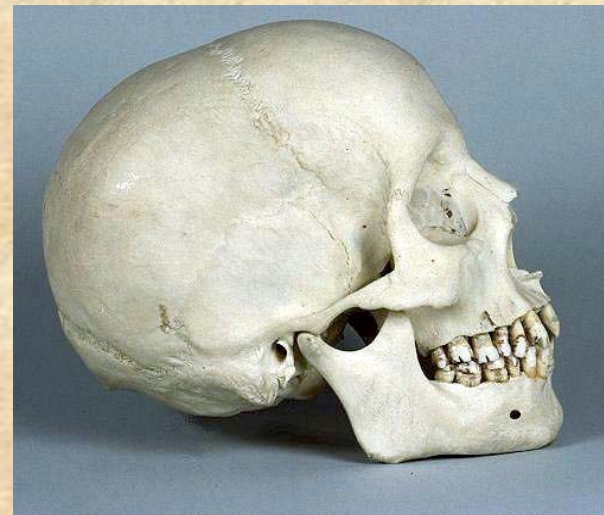
◆Teeth were often filed or inlaid with jade or other precious minerals.



◆The heads of infants were often flattened with boards to give the child an enviable long slanted forehead.



Flattened Skull



Normal Skull

# Diet

- ❏ **Food, both breakfast and dinner were based on corn, tortillas or soup.**
- ❏ **Meat was a rarity, often it was turkey or lizard eggs.**
- ❏ **They also raised dogs for food.**
- ❏ **Mayans loved CHOCOLATE!**

# Sports

- ❏ Games of chance were played.
- ❏ The most important sport was the ball game, which had powerful religious significance.
- ❏ The Mayans built ball courts to play their games (most about the size of the APR)





❖ **Special “Sacred” ball games” were held after a significant battle.**

❖ It is said that the winning captain would present his head to the losing captain, who then decapitates him.

❖ Mayans believed this to be the ultimate honor; the winning captain getting a direct ticket to heaven.

❖ **The acoustics on the field are unparalleled.**

❖ A whisper from one end of the court can be heard clearly at the other end.

❖ This characteristic made it a common place for rituals.

# **Collapse of the Maya Civilization**

- ◆ **About the year 900 C.E. the Maya culture began to decline.**
- ◆ **Urban centers were being abandoned.**
- ◆ **Scientists do not know the reason for this mysterious collapse.**
- ◆ **They hypothesize that a variety of causes contributed. Among these were:**
  - ◆ **A change in the climate -a prolonged drought causing water shortages.**
  - ◆ **Over-exploitation of the land causing localized environmental problems.**
  - ◆ **Political Warfare -Conflicts between cities and other cultures for resources.**



# A Culture in Ruins

- **There are hundreds of significant archeological sites.**
- **There are thousands of smaller ones.**
- **Mayan ruins can be nearly invisible in the dense jungle undergrowth.**
- **Satellite photos have shown that there are up to 4,000 Mayan sites deep in the jungles that archaeologists have not yet found.**

**But ...**

- There are still 4 to 6 million Maya living in small villages of the region today.
- They only maintain bits of the ancient culture.
- They speak 31 different languages.

**CHANGE HAPPENS**



**Uncovering the past ... is our key to the future**



Calakmul Archaeological Area, just north of the Guatemala border;  
partially excavated