

The Mayans

Many archeologists believe that Mayan civilization was the most advanced civilization in the Americas for centuries. But as quickly as they appeared, they vanished leaving behind just the cities they once inhabited and a few interesting artifacts that still confuse archeologists today. The remains of the Mayan civilization were found in 1773 by Friar Ordonez from Mexico. In fact the city discovered by Ordonez was one of the most important discoveries of the past 1000 years - the city he found was named Palenque.



The Maya first emerged as a group around 1800BC. They spread throughout Central America by forming a series of city-states which were bound together by religious beliefs and trade. Surprisingly, many of the Mayan achievements surpassed those of any European civilization which existed at the same time - they built better roads than the Romans,

they were more scientifically advanced than the Greeks, and their pyramids were equal to those of ancient Egypt.

The main problem with discovering all there is to learn about the Mayan civilization is the lack of any significant records. This can be credited to the Spanish in the 16th century who, when they began to colonize the Americas tried to remove all traces of the previous civilizations in the New World. They wiped out entire civilizations, destroyed their cities, and burned any records. Although the Mayan civilization had disappeared around 600 years before the discovery of the Americas by Columbus in 1492, there were still many artifacts which could have helped us to understand the Mayan way of life - with the invasion of the Spanish these were nearly all destroyed.

In fact, only four pieces of writing were saved from destruction. From these four pieces, it is very obvious that the Maya were very advanced astronomers and mathematicians. Astronomers are people who study the planets and the stars and mathematicians study math. The Mayans had three different calendars. The first consisted of 260 day 'years' and 20 day 'months'. The second contained a more 'usual' 365 day 'year'. The third calendar was much more useful for measuring long periods of time. This calendar measured time in blocks of 5,152 years. Their entire calendar was based around the movements of the planet Venus whose course they plotted very accurately.

However advanced the Maya were, there is no denying that they were also a blood-thirsty people. They possessed at least 166 gods who had to be appeased with constant rituals - usually involving blood. Initially, animal blood was sufficient. However as time passed they moved on to human sacrifices.



The end of the Mayan reign as leaders of the Americas came around 900AD. It is thought that the Maya were invaded around this time and that the Mayans believed that this was the god who would destroy them. However, due to the lack of records, the truth behind their demise will never be known.

1. Who was the first to find remains of the Mayans? _____
2. What is the main problem with learning about the Mayans? _____
3. Who destroyed many of the Mayan records? _____
4. What are astronomers and mathematicians? _____
5. What tells you the Mayans were blood-thirsty? _____
6. How is it believed that Mayan civilization ended? _____

