

Chapter 1 : The 15 Main Mayan Ceremonial Centers | Life Persona

The layout of the Maya towns and cities, and more particularly of the ceremonial centers where the royal families and courtiers resided, is characterized by the rhythm of immense horizontal stucco floors of plazas often located at various levels, connected.

At El Mirador, in northernmost Guatemala, for example, evidence is just now coming to light regarding its impressive proportions, its age, and its configuration. This does not mean, however, that the principle of solstitial orientation had been either forgotten or totally abandoned, because that was definitely not the case. Where the topography permitted -- and among the lowland Maya, this was in very few instances indeed -- locating a ceremonial center with respect to a solstitial sunrise or sunset was still most probably the preferred principle to employ. He noted that sight-lines from Building VII to the northern corner of Building I and to the southern corner of Building III mark the sunrise positions on the summer and winter solstices, respectively, while a sight-line through the middle of Building II commemorates the equinoctial sunrise [Rojas, , 25, Indeed, one is tempted to speculate that the Maya may initially have thought that the culminating peak of that range was Baldy Beacon, but upon discovering some years later that this was not true, they felt obliged to build a second and larger ceremonial center to commemorate the critical calendrical event over the higher mountain. Otherwise, there is certainly little reason for having located two major ceremonial centers so close to one another -- a matter which, it may be pointed out, has long puzzled most archaeologists see Figure Because the oldest Long Count inscription found at Tikal traces back to A. In what has to have been the greatest crescendo of land clearing and city building that the Mesoamerican world had ever witnessed, the Maya peoples rose to unparalleled heights of political organization, economic prosperity, and social sophistication. Only in later Classic times after A. Indeed, most likely because of the environment in which they lived, their most extensive political unit did not evolve beyond the level of the city-state. The most unfortunate consequence of this fact, in turn, was an ongoing rivalry between adjacent political dynasties which manifested itself in an almost endemic state of warfare. Throughout the Classic Period, literally scores of major ceremonial centers were erected, and each of these in turn probably served as the "central place" for a cluster of as many as a dozen other subsidiary settlements. As populations grew, however, additional measures were undertaken to impound or store water during the rainy season, including the construction of chultunes, or underground reservoirs, cut out of the limestone bedrock and plastered with clay. Nevertheless, to suggest that the resultant settlement pattern of the Maya approximated that which would have theoretically developed on an isotropic or homogeneous plain, as some writers have done, is to ignore totally the fact that the availability of water was neither ubiquitous nor uniform throughout the region. On the other hand, it is probably safe to say that during the entire Classic Period not a single major Maya ceremonial center was erected without preserving in at least one of its key structures an alignment either to a solstice or to the sunset on August All Maya ceremonial centers likewise employed the Long Count in the dating of their monuments. The principle of solstitial orientation was developed as early as the fourteenth century B. Its heyday was definitely limited to Formative times. Here was a culture region characterized by organized political entities with hierarchical social and economic systems dominated by priestly castes; great ceremonial centers laid out according to carefully executed plans and adorned with imposing structures of monumental architecture; an elaborate and extensive trading network which linked its every corner and penetrated even the adjacent areas of present-day Central America and the southeastern United States; and an essentially uniform religious philosophy. Although the names of the deities differed from one language area to another, it is clear from the manner in which they were artistically depicted that the rain-god, for example, be he known as Tlaloc, Chac, Cocijo, or Pije, was really one and the same. Moreover, the calendars with which the different peoples of the region recorded their history and scheduled their rituals were likewise but variations on a common theme. Indeed, by this time the cultural influences which had given "Mesoamerica" its regional distinctiveness had been diffused to all but the farthest reaches of its geographic frontiers. The principle of orientation to the August 13th sunset was probably first utilized about B. Its use implies an enhanced level of sophistication over and above the

basic principle of solstitial orientation. Perhaps the most significant alignments of this structure are those of its front door and its principal window, located just above it, both of which look out at the western horizon toward the sunset position on August. Therefore, it was probably only a question of time before their curiosity would send them off on a couple of more distant expeditions to answer two of the most fundamental questions posed by their cultural heritage. Although the Pleiades set within minutes of the sun -- at the right-hand edge of the window -- they were not visible in the bright afterglow of the sun. A reconstruction of a late April sunset in the year A. It clearly shows the setting sun in the middle of the window and the Pleiades to the upper right. On August 13th, when the sun is again overhead at Izapa, the same phenomenon may be observed, but without the presence of the Pleiades. Photograph courtesy of E. The first question had to do with the day sacred almanac. Inasmuch as it had begun with the southward passage of the zenithal sun, it must be possible, they reasoned, to find a place where such an interval could be measured. Naively enough, they probably assumed that if they could locate that place, then they would have discovered the birthplace of their cultural forefathers. For some inexplicable reason, the Long Count either never diffused into the highlands of Oaxaca or onto the Mexican plateau, or if it did, it was never appreciated and adopted by the peoples of these regions. As a result, its use was restricted to the Maya, for whom it became a tool of inestimable value in furthering their knowledge of complex astronomical cycles, such as those of Venus and of solar and lunar eclipses. The second question was related to the day secular calendar. Its count was initiated when the sun reached its farthest northerly point in the sky. Every year the priests watched as the sun made its annual "pilgrimage" from far to the south -- over Orizaba -- to far to the north -- somewhere in the northern desert. Would it be possible, they wondered, to find out where "the sun stands still"? Expressed in terms of Western geography, they were asking where the Tropic of Cancer was located. And, perhaps if they discovered where this happened, maybe they would even find out why it happened. These, of course, were two very sound geographic questions and to answer them fieldwork would be required. Expeditions would have to be sent out to determine physically where the sun passed vertically overhead on the equivalent of August 13 and where the sun "stood still" on the equivalent of June. In the first instance they realized that the quest would take them southward, no doubt to the fabled paradise of Tamoanchan. The mandate was clear: For carrying out the second expedition, the Teotihuacanos themselves were the best situated of any people in Mesoamerica, for the vast expanses of the northern desert began almost within sight of their own city. This was not to be an easy mission, however, for it would take the explorers directly out into the barbarous, unforgiving country of the "Chichimecs" -- the nomadic hunters and gatherers who somehow scavenged a living from the meager resources of this desolate region. But again, the goal was not in doubt: For an expedition starting southward out of Tikal, the choice of routes was a relatively clear-cut one. Even before the journey had started, the rainforest had closed in on every side. If their course veered too far to the southeast they would find themselves encumbered in the granite ridges of the Maya Mountains, whereas if it turned too far to the southwest they would soon get mired down in the swampy lowlands in the headwaters of the Usumacinta drainage system. To avoid these obstacles, they found it best to follow the height of land on which Tikal was situated. By that time, however, the folded ranges of the Cuchumatanes were looming up on the southern horizon, arcing into ever higher crests toward the southwest. By this time they had put more than 90 km of forest trail behind them, but the priests who were leading the expedition knew that many more days of travel still lay ahead. Back in Tikal the zenithal sun passed overhead on the equivalent of August 5 and did not again cross the zenith until May 8. Although the former date was only 8 days before the "day that time began," the sun was also 8 days too late in its second passage over Tikal, resulting in an interval of days between the two zenithal passages. Now, as they entered the Motagua Valley, the priests checked the interval between vertical suns again, and found that it had narrowed to about days. Its southward passage took place on the equivalent of August 10 and its northward transit occurred on May 2. There was no option now but to follow the Motagua upstream until the correct interval could be located. As the expedition moved up along the river, it found a place where two tributaries joined the Motagua, one from each side of the valley. Certainly, its location was a strategic one, for it ultimately came to dominate the trade routes which led from the Caribbean into the Guatemalan highlands. But if they thought they had found the "birthplace of time," they were wrong,

because the closest interval they could measure between zenithal sun passages was days. The sun was still moving southward a day too early and returning northward a day too late! The golden age of Mesoamerica came about A. No doubt heartened by the fact that they must be drawing near to their goal, the priests probably sent scouts ahead to assess what results their continued journey up the Motagua Valley would produce. The report that came back may have been somewhat disappointing, for the scouts would have noted that the countryside quickly began to deteriorate into an environment the Maya had never experienced before. The forest thinned out and disappeared, becoming first an area of low scrub trees bristling with thorns, and finally, where not even these would grow, patches of cactus took over. Another bit of information which the scouts brought back must have unsettled the priests equally as much, for they reported that upstream, beyond this uninviting pocket of desert, the Motagua Valley curved to the west. Therefore, it would no longer provide a convenient corridor to "the birthplace of time," which still lay about one day of "sun travel" to the south. At the time of year the zenithal sun passes over this region in its apparent north-to-south "migration" it is moving about 16 km [10 mi] per day. The only reassuring news with which they returned was that, in the desert-pocket itself, a tributary river joined the Motagua from the south. Perhaps by following that to its headwaters a "green oasis" might be found where the sacred day interval could be measured. As they climbed higher into the mountains, they watched as the desert browns were exchanged with forest greens as the scrub-thorn trees disappeared and stands of pine and oak took their place. Finally, where the valley widened out and the river slowed its pace in a series of sweeping meanders, the priests jubilantly announced that "this is the place! It was not the tropical paradise that most of them had probably visualized when the expedition began, but it did meet the criteria of the "place where time began. Its earliest Long Count stela dates to the year A. Like the Maya expedition, they were confronted with a choice of three possible routes. The first led out onto the plateau along the inner side of the Sierra Madre Oriental, the great eastern wall of the Mexican meseta. Shaped by the westward thrust of the North American plate, the Sierra Madre Oriental was made up of a jumble of contorted limestone ridges. By staying in the foothills, the explorers could avoid the rugged terrain of the folded mountain crests, but along the backslopes of this range they would forever be in the rainshadow of the moisture-bearing winds from the Gulf of Mexico; hence, water would be almost impossible to find. About the first half of the fifth century A. The astronomical site which the expedition founded was Chalchihuites, where sight-lines marking the summer solstice sunrise were perpetuated as trenches in the earth. A second possibility would be to strike out through the middle of the plateau, though along this route water would likewise be at a premium. The third possibility lay along the foothills of the Sierra Madre Occidental, the massive basaltic barrier which formed the western edge of the Mexican plateau. The result of extensive outpourings of lava during earlier movements of the North American plate, the Sierra Madre Occidental rose in many places to even higher elevations than its counterpart range on the east of the plateau. As a result, its crests intercepted whatever moisture escaped being squeezed out on the windward side of the Sierra Madre Oriental, and therefore they supported extensive forests of pine. Indeed, these cooler, damper uplands gave rise to several rivers of considerable size which descended to the floor of the plateau and in some instances even managed to snake their way for a distance out into the desert basins before disappearing into the sand or evaporating in a temporary salt lake. Surely, of the three alternatives this latter route was the most promising, because along it the occurrence of water would definitely be the most dependable. Their journey would continue until they found a place either where the sun moved no farther north at all or where it stood still for a day or two and then turned southward once more. Keeping pace with its migration would have been no real problem in a latitudinal sense, but finding a suitable route in terms of terrain and access to water posed more of a challenge -- perhaps doubling the actual distance covered in a given day. In any event, whether the journey was accomplished in one season or in many, it resulted in the founding of a ceremonial center at what is now known as either Alta Vista or Chalchihuites in the state of Zacatecas. Located at an elevation of in ft in the eastern foothills of the Sierra Madre Occidental, it has access to a stream just below it and a sweeping view over the mountains to the east. Situated within 2 km 1. To reinforce this alignment the builders of the site dug trenches about 2. Nearby, a temple with 28 irregular columns apparently replicates the changing size of the moon as it advances from one phase to another, and on an adjacent hilltop, two pecked crosses of

unmistakable Teotihuacano vintage have been found Aveni, , 5. Dating to the late fifth or early sixth century A. The ceremonial center of Chalchihuites, or Alta Vista, Zacatecas, appears to have been founded early in the fifth century A. From this place, located a short distance south of the Tropic of Cancer, the summer solstice sunrise could be calibrated over Cerro Picacho, the sharp peak in the middle background.

Chapter 2 : The Maya built cities and ceremonial centers that for : Sentence Correction (SC)

Get this from a library! Ceremonial centers of the Maya.. [Roy C Craven; William R Bullard; M E Kampen] -- "In preparation for a major exhibition of photographs of Maya art and of artifacts of Maya origin, Roy C. Craven, Jr., made three trips to Central America.

The civilization never exactly unified cohesively, but was more like an assembly of small states. Each had a king, with the stronger cities dominating the weaker ones. Then, the Ancient Maya cities were dramatically and somewhat inexplicably abandoned. In the Pre-classic period, the Maya mastered agriculture. This was likely due to the cultivation of more productive maize crops and the development of nixtamal, a process that drastically increased its nutritive value. The corn was grouped with beans, squash, peppers, avocados, and tomatoes, to create fields with valuable symbiotic relationships. Thanks in part to more reliable, stationary nutrition, cities gradually developed during the Classic period. As the civilization hit its stride, people had more time for intellectual pursuits. Science, art, and architecture advanced during this era, as did trade, religion, and social hierarchies. They developed a calendar and writing systems. They built huge pyramids, vaulted ceilings, and elaborate ball courts. They used advanced techniques with ceramics, mathematics, and astronomy. Some historians believe that this growth is what ultimately caused the demise of the ancient Maya civilization. What we do know is that the fall of the great Maya cities was not an immediate occurrence, as would happen with something like a pandemic or natural disaster. The gradual decline took around years. Scholars have cited three factors in the demise, with each having some influence. There was increased warfare, both within the civilization and possibly from outside. Overpopulation was straining their available resources. And that strain may have exacerbated by a series of droughts, starting around CE. However, it is extremely important to note that this collapse was not the end of the Mayan culture. In these places, millions of Mayans continue to live in small villages, speak their indigenous languages, and uphold ancient religious and agricultural customs. This means that many different ecologies and landscapes were at play. This, in turn, led to ruins in overgrown jungles, massive pyramids towering over desert-like expanses, and coastal cities overlooking the Caribbean. It was completely empty by Caracol is located less than 50 miles from Tikal of whom it was once a client state, and eventually an enemy and swaddled in centuries of jungle. At the site, there are several plazas, a couple of ball courts, incredible art, and over tombs. These are the largest ancient Mayan ruins in Belize, covering nearly 34 square miles. Caracol is now part of the Chiquibil Forest Reserve, and has not been overly excavated. In other words, there will be plenty of wildlife to spot on this journey.

Chapter 3 : First ceremonial centers of the Maya were. A. Large statuary B. Carved

The basic plan of Maya ceremonial centers, particularly in the southern lowlands, was a rectangular plaza enclosed on three or four sides by mounds. These plazas were often artificially dressed hilltops, as at Uaxactun, or terraced hillsides, as at Piedras Negras and Palenque.

Information on the Ancient Maya Civilization Location The total area is around , square kilometers. Who Were the Maya The Maya were one of the most brilliant and powerful cultures known to Mesoamerica, indeed their civilization spanned a period of 3, years. They had a written language, were skilled architects, adventurous traders and gifted artisans. They lived in an agrarian society and had a well-developed religious system which venerated the cosmos. Royal dynasties spawned rulers who built the exotic temples and commanding ceremonial centers which still stand today. Maya civilization is divided into three different time periods. The Pre-Classic spanned the years B. The Maya reached their peak during the Classic period when they produced some of their most extraordinary works. By the time the Europeans arrived, the empire had mysteriously disintegrated and what was left of it was weak and in disarray. Many Maya groups, however, continued to defend their homeland against the invaders and refused to give up their ancient beliefs. Indeed, centuries of Spanish rule could not eliminate their language, traditional dress or religious ceremonies, and today visitors have the opportunity to meet the modern-day Maya. The region offers lovely, timeworn pyramids and temples which represent the highest artistic expression of the culture. Not to be outdone, Mother Nature steps in with an exciting display of rain forests, mountains, untamed jungle, tranquil lakes and tumultuous rivers. Myriad ecosystems at work and abundant flora and fauna make the area suitable for eco-minded or soft adventure tourists. There are also palm-fringed beaches, luxury resort hotels, the underwater wonderland of the Great Maya Reef for divers and a multitude of colorful villages inhabited by the descendants of the ancient Maya to visit. In short, the Maya World has something for everyone. Now considered one of the most advanced civilizations ever to exist in ancient America, the Maya are credited with a series of astonishing breakthroughs. Their civilization endured for more than 3, years, from around 2, B. Mayan history is divided into three periods: Pre-Classic, from B. They were characterized by: Irrigation was practised in some areas. Apart from social and political policies, the most dramatic achievements of the culture included a calendar which was infinitely more accurate than the Gregorian in use today, the invention of the "zero" in their mathematical system and the development of astronomy and astrology to a high science by charting the movements of the sun, moon and stars. The Maya were also very creative and excelled in sculpture, painting, pottery and other arts. The carved facades of their temples and palaces rival those of ancient Greece and Rome and the jade artifacts, polychrome ceramics and bone carvings found at sites throughout the area are eloquent testimony to their skills. The ancient Maya lived in an agrarian society, growing corn, beans, squash, yucca and a form of sweet potato and supplementing their diet with wild game tracked by hunters and fish caught in nearby rivers, lakes and seas. Corn formed the backbone of Maya cuisine in the form of tamales, tortillas and atole, a hot breakfast drink. The Maya even worshipped a corn god to ensure good harvest. Chocolate, which comes from a bean of the cacao tree, was known as the "drink of the gods" because, by law, only the nobility could drink it. An old story from Chiapas relates that after the Spanish made chocolate widely available, the mestizos drank it in church to sustain themselves during long Masses. Chiapas, today, has a special chocolate drink called tascalate made from a mixture of chocolate, ground pine nuts, achiote, vanilla and sugar. Regional specialties are chicken and pork pibil, made with achiote spice similar to paprika , marinated in orange juice and baked in a pit. The sour orange, which is native to the region, is also used to make a superb dessert pie. Wild turkey, duck, pheasant and deer were hunted by the ancient Maya. Although deer hunting is now restricted in Mexico, delicious turkey and wild game can be found on most menus. Tabasco is the only place in the world where you can enjoy such surprising dishes as "pejelagarto an alligator-headed fish seasoned with amashito chile and lemon. Beef, pork and chicken dishes are common in the Maya region. Many herbs are used in seasoning, like epazote for tamales. But a rare herb called chipilin, found in Chiapas and Tabasco, is used in tamales stuffed with diced shrimp. The king of

Chiapas tamales, however, is made with chopped pork, egg, olives and prunes, and covered with spicy mole sauce made with bananas. Fish and seafood dishes reign supreme along the Caribbean coast of Mexico, Belize, Guatemala and Honduras. Ceviche, or raw fish, shrimp, lobster, squid or conch, is chopped and marinated in lime juice which "cooks" it. Belizean cooking bears many similarities to Caribbean cuisine and many recipes were indeed introduced to the country by Creoles from the islands. Tropical fruits such as mangos, bananas, guava, papaya, pineapple, watermelon and mamey, are plentiful in the Maya World. In some areas, liqueurs are made from honey and fruit while breakfast preserves are made from bananas, guavas and mango. Today the legacy of the Maya is recognized worldwide thanks to excavation work, the deciphering of their glyph language and diligent research. They not only developed a calendar as accurate as our Gregorian but were also highly-skilled astronomers, astrologers, urban planners and excelled as mathematicians. Yet, each major city-state was carefully planned with temples and palaces in the center, a nearby ball court for the famous pre-Hispanic team sport and the surrounding adobe houses of the common people at a respectable distance from the ceremonial center of town. This technique was a handy substitute for a true arch. When it came to mathematics, time and calendars, the Maya were geniuses. Believing that time repeated itself in cycles, they devised two calendars, one ritualistic, which was used for religious celebrations and astrological predictions, and the other a solar calendar. Both calendars were based on the calculation that a year had a little more than 360 days, a more precise system than the Gregorian calendar. Following the movement of the sun, moon and stars with such accuracy, the Maya were able to predict such mystifying phenomena as eclipses and the Spring and Autumn equinoxes. The Maya also incorporated the concept of zero in their mathematical system long before it was discovered by others. Instead of the decimal system, however, they used a vigesimal count, multiplying by 20 instead of ten. Eventually, they used the katun or a year period to record the passage of time. Another major step forward by the Maya was the invention of their hieroglyphic writing system. Glyphs embellished stelae and temples throughout the Maya world and cover the famous hieroglyphic stairway at Copan. Hieroglyphics were used to record historical events or, as at Copan, the achievements of the royal dynasty. Unfortunately, actual books or codices written by the Maya on deerskin or tree bark and formed like concertinas, were destroyed by the Spanish conquistadors. Only three codices, which have found their way to foreign museums, escaped destruction. The codices related Maya mythology, history, religious beliefs and arts and sciences through brightly-painted ideograms, or symbols. Maya scholars were not able to interpret the glyphs until 20 years ago when a team of Mexican and U.S. The Maya also had a strong oral tradition which was strengthened after the destruction of the codices. A text of the ancient "Popol Vuh" or "Book of Advice", written in the Maya Quiche language of Guatemala, was discovered by a 17th friar and rescued from oblivion. Translated into Spanish by the monk, Popol Vuh described the creation of the universe, according to Maya beliefs and legends. The Maya culture produced fine sculptors who created beautifully-proportioned figures in perfect balance and harmony on stelae. Doorframes were elaborately carved while facades and columns of buildings were covered with masks and friezes to honor the gods. Pottery-making also developed into a popular handicraft. Ceremonial pieces were often painted with mythological figures. Gold jewelry was principally for ceremonial use. People also hung pieces of jade carved in the shape of an animal or a bead around their neck to ward off illness. It is set apart from other Maya ruins by a magnificently carved Hieroglyphic Stairway. Dedicated in A.D. Many villages specialize in one particular craft which has been perfected through the generation of artisans. Any of these treasured handicrafts can be found on display at Mayan markets. The tianguis, as the markets were called, were centers of local and regional trade. Weaving is the outstanding Maya craft, an ancient art that has survived uninterrupted for centuries and is now become famous all over the world. The Maya say weaving was a gift of the Moon Goddess Ixchel to their women. She also gave them the backstrap loom and told them what sacred symbols to use in their designs. Textiles made from cotton were used by the ancient Maya just as they are today. Ceremonial vestments were infinitely more decorative and nowadays they are commonly used to dress the figures of saints inside churches. The Maya also make baskets, pottery and wood carvings of animals, saints and brightly-painted toys and chests. Ceremonial masks are yet another specialty, some portray men with blue eyes and beards and represent the Spaniards. Many masks are used in religious dances usually depicting the Conquest. Population figures vary

with estimates ranging from four to six million depending on the criteria used for the survey. Although changes were imposed upon them by the Spanish conquistadors years ago, the Maya managed to preserve many of their ancestral traditions, giving their culture a rich timeless quality. A visit to any Maya village will confirm this. During the Classic Age of the Maya over a thousand years ago, various powerful city-states ruled the area but by the time the Spaniards arrived, these urban centers had been abandoned and the empire was disintegrating. Many of the Maya, especially in Chiapas and Guatemala, were living in hidden recesses of the mountainous sierra. But for the visits of missionaries who set out to convert them to Roman Catholicism and abolish human sacrifice, these villages lay isolated from the mainstream of development for hundreds of years. This left many traditions undisturbed, which today fascinate both historians and anthropologists. The Maya practice their own brand of Christianity which is a blend of Catholic tradition and ancient ritual. In some churches in the Maya World, healing rites are carried out with the aid of the sacrifice of a live chicken and offerings of eggs, coca cola and aguardiente in the presence of Catholic icons. Sometimes there are neither Catholic priests nor masses. Lasting from a day to a week, the celebrations usually include colorful folk dances, music and processions. Some of the more traditional communities still honor the old deities like the corn god to ensure good harvests.

Chapter 4 : Honduras Mayan Ruins

The first ceremonial center of the Olmecs was on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, near the modern city of Veracruz, and they served as the nerve center of the first complex society of the Americas, that of the Olmecs.

They are often regarded as the Mother Culture of later Middle American civilizations. The Olmec people called themselves Xi pronounced Shi. Portrait of a man. This life-sized greenstone head was found at Tenango del Valle, Mexico State, surprisingly a distance west from the Olmec heartland of Veracruz and Tabasco. Those three major Olmec centers are spaced from east to west across the domain so that each center could exploit, control, and provide a distinct set of natural resources valuable to the overall Olmec economy. La Venta, the eastern center, is near the rich estuaries of the coast, and also could have provided cacao, rubber, and salt. San Lorenzo, at the center of the Olmec domain, controlled the vast flood plain area of Coatzacoalcos basin and riverline trade routes. Laguna de los Cerros, adjacent to the Tuxtlas mountains, is positioned near important sources of basalt, a stone needed to manufacture manos, metates, and monuments. Perhaps marriage alliances between Olmec centers helped maintain such an exchange network. The epi-Olmec - from 31B. Detail of Long Count Date The low relief on this stone shows the detail from a four-digit numerical recording, read as The vigesimal or base counting system has been used across Mesoamerica. A value of 5 is represented by a bar, and a value of 1 is represented by a dot, such that the three bars and single dot here stands for The Maya would later adopt this counting system for their Long Count calendar. The date in this relief is the oldest recorded date in Mesoamerica, corresponding to a day in the year 31 B. Both the Olmec and epi-Olmec had hieroglyphic writing systems. The Olmec had both a syllabic and hieroglyphic script. The hieroglyphic signs were simply Olmec syllabic signs used to make pictures. There are two forms of Olmec hieroglyphic writing: The decipherment of the Olmec writing of ancient Mexico provides us with keen insight into the world of the Olmec. SOCIETY Many early scholars were reluctant to believe that a society as sophisticated as the Olmec could have developed in the tropical habitat of the Gulf coast, and some hypothesized that the Olmec had originally migrated from elsewhere. However, recent excavations have provided valuable new information on the antiquity of those sites, and on Olmec ways of life at those centers. They were corn farmers who supplemented their diets with fishing and hunting. Linguists suggest that they spoke a language related to the Mixe and Zoque languages of today. The Olmec architecture at San Lorenzo, for example, includes both public-ceremonial buildings, elite residences, and the houses of commoners. Olmec public-ceremonial buildings were most typically earthen platform mounds, some of which had larger house-like structures built upon them. At La Venta we can see that after B. The new San Lorenzo research suggests those systems were actually aqueducts used to provide drinking water to the different areas of the settlement. Some of the aqueduct stones, such as San Lorenzo Monument 52, were also monuments, indicating that the aqueduct system had a sacred character as well. Archaeologists working at La Venta twenty years ago discovered what they hypothesized were the remains of a ball court there, and it is possible that such ball courts were also part of the architecture at Olmec centers. In the years to come, artifacts from the culture later termed Olmec turned up at widespread sites in Mexico and adjacent Central America, with the greatest number of characteristic themes being present in the region of the original discovery. Monuments were also an important characteristic of Olmec centers. Today they provide us with some idea of the nature of Olmec ideology. Colossal heads glorified the rulers while they were alive, and commemorated them as revered ancestors after their death. Altars were actually the thrones of Olmec rulers. The carving on the front of the throne shows the identified ruler sitting in a niche that symbolizes a cave entrance to the supernatural powers of the underworld. The magnificent colossal stone heads, massive altars, and sophisticated anthropomorphic and zoomorphic statues found at Olmec sites in southern Veracruz and Tabasco, are the oldest known monuments in Prehispanic Mexico. In a carving was discovered near the gigantic head with a characteristic Olmec design on one side and a date symbol on the other. This revealed a shocking truth: Hundreds of years earlier than anyone had imagined, simple villages had given way to a complex society governed by kings and priests, with impressive ceremonial centers and artworks. It is now known that two colossal stone heads from San Lorenzo had

originally been large rectangular altars that were later resculpted into colossal heads. When a ruler died, he was venerated by converting his throne into his colossal portrait head. Although archaeology has answered many questions about the Olmec, many more still remain. Research has concentrated primarily on the centers of San Lorenzo and La Venta, and very little is known about Laguna de los Cerros, or smaller Olmec centers, or Olmec life in small farming hamlets. We also have very little archaeological information about the B. San Lorenzo and La Venta declined in importance, perhaps due to major change in the river systems that helped support those centers. However, in the northern area of the Olmec domain there was some cultural continuity long after B. Tres Zapotes became an important post-Olmec center, and Laguna de los Cerros continued as a major center into the Classic period. One of the huge Olmec sculptures found at La Venta - This head is approximately 6 feet tall and 5 feet across. The stone it was cut from was quarried more than 50 miles from where it was discovered, prompting speculation about how it was transported. ART The Olmecs made fine pottery and carved jade jewelry. They had early achievements in art. Perhaps the most incredible findings from the Olmec culture are the sculptures. The Olmec used wood, basalt and jade to make the statues. The wooden artifacts are said to be the oldest in Mesoamerica. The Olmec used basalt to make colossal heads. The size of these heads ranged from 5 feet to 11 feet tall. Some say the heads represent sacrificial offering. Others think they portray the elite Olmec ancestors. These heads have also been interpreted as being warriors or ball players. Basalt was also used to carve thrones. The Olmec used art to glorify rulers by making them monuments of super natural creatures to portray them such as part human, part beast. The beast was usually the jaguar. It is believed that these monuments were annihilated after the death of the leader. The figurines made of jade were small and sexless. Some of the more elaborate statues wore extensive headdress with a long train, and rectangular chest plates, sat cross-legged, leaned forward and looked straight ahead. A characteristic motif of Olmec art is a human face with a jaguar mouth, sometimes called a "were-jaguar" as in werewolf. This suggests a derivation of Olmec religion from shamanistic shape-shifting. There is evidence that the Olmecs practiced human sacrifice, including that of infants. Jaguar Child The most well-known aspect of shamanism in Mesoamerican religion - and in the whole of Native American shamanism - is the ability to assume the powers of animals associated with the shaman. Such animals are called nahuales, and in Olmec art the most common of these is the jaguar. In a sense, the optimal spirit would have the spirituality and intellect of man and the ferocity and strength of the jaguar - these are all combined in the shaman and his jaguar nahuale. The Jaguar Child may exemplify this combination. This is a very common representation in Olmec art, and it often includes the slitted eyes and curved mouth pronounced in this close-up. Almost all of these colossal heads bear the same features - flattened nose, wide lips, and capping headpiece - possible features of the Olmec warrior-kings. Of the 9 heads catalogued from the ruins of San Lorenzo in southern Veracruz state, this is referred to as San Lorenzo 6. Dallas Museum Olmec Ruler - or God - connected physical and spiritual worlds. His pose represents his means to link with the supernatural worlds. The turned down mouth, a feline feature, suggests that the human ruler was aided by a power animal such as a cat, jaguar, traditionally the spirit companion of shamans and kings. This God could have a water-earth persona. As a jaguar encompassing the forces of life or at least a dominance in its two strongest categories with regards to Olmec life, water and earth. This deity supposedly had dominance over all things terrestrial and celestial. This God may have been half-jaguar, half-serpent. The jaguar represents the Earth Mother with the serpent representing the water, thus combining to represent life. RAIN GOD It was formerly thought that the Olmec worshiped only one god, a rain deity depicted as a were-jaguar, but study has shown that there were at least 10 distinct gods represented in Olmec art. Surely present were several important deities of the later, established Meso-American pantheon, such as the fire god, rain god, corn god, and Feathered Serpent. Other aspects of mental culture are less well-known; some Olmec jades and a monument from La Venta have non-calendrical hieroglyphs, but none of this writing has been deciphered. The Olmecs are believed to be one of the first tribes to engage in Shamanistic rituals. It is believed that the Olmecs were a kind of "mother culture" which directly gave rise to all subsequent major civilisations and this is how Shamanism first spread. The Olmecs are said to have been ancestors of the Jaquar. The Olmec Tribe believed that the Jaquar was a rain deity and fertility diety. The Jaquar was chosen because the Olmecs believed it was the most powerful and feared animal. They also

believed that the Jaguar was an Avatar of the living and the dead. The men would sacrifice blood to the jaguar, wear masks, dance, and crack whips to imitate the sound of thunder. This ritual was done in May. The Olmec also made offerings of jade figures to the jaguar. The Olmecs made numerous statues representing "Were - Jaguar " men. These men are normally shown with grimacing Jaguar facial features with Human bodies. They are believed to be men , of the Olmec tribe, that are transforming into the Jaguar.

Chapter 5 : First ceremonial centers of the Maya were. A. Large statuary B. | page 2

The Maya built cities and ceremonial centers that for reasons still unknown they abandoned in the tenth century, and left the jungle to cover them. (A) "" (B) For reasons still unknown, in the tenth century the Maya abandoned the cities and ceremonial centers they had built, leaving.

The Mayan civilization Was a culture that flourished in the region of Mesoamerica With about 8 million inhabitants. Its settlements were characterized by great pyramids and platforms made of earth and stone. The Coba Temple is one of the main Mayan ceremonial centers. These cities were able to build temples for the public ceremonies that in turn attracted more inhabitants. The site flourished from the 6th century to the 1st century BC, during the preclassic period. At the time it hosted up to 10, people. The site has stepped pyramids and squares arranged to visualize astronomical phenomena. This was occupied in the preclassic period until the Classic Terminal period, between A. Its estimated population ranged from to 10, inhabitants. The priests-kings and nobility inhabited the main ceremonial center and the common people occupied the spaces in the periphery of this one. This center flourished during the late preclassic period between A. Its population is estimated at 3, inhabitants. This center flourished in AD. Where a massive construction of buildings is dated. Caracol houses 53 monuments of gravel and more than tombs and catacombs. For the early classic period, this was part of an extensive network of trade routes. The central square has temples on all three sides. This center comprises one of the most complex road networks in the Mayan world. In its staggered temples there are stelae that document the ceremonial life and the most important events of its flowering in the late classical period. This was considered like capital city of one of the kingdoms of the classic period between centuries V and IX A. The complex has stepped pyramids that juxtapose around a central plaza. This complex was considered as one of the most powerful cities that existed in the Mayan world during the classic period. It is estimated that its population reached about 50, people. At present, about 6, structures have been identified, among which the great pyramid stands out. It rises over 45 meters, making it one of the highest Mayan pyramids. This place is particularly known for the amount of water tributaries surrounding the site, which is not common among settlements of its type. It has about 25 squares and hundreds of other buildings. This was a medium ceremonial center that flourished during the late classical period, between and BC. The ceremonial center of the city covers an area in which 6 stelae, 33 plazas and several temples and areas of nobility are identified. It is a site of medium extension that flourished in the classic period between to BC. This is located at the junction of several of the most important trade routes in the region. The ceremonial center is distributed around three squares. The Great Square reaches meters long, the largest of the entire Mayan region. The site was originally believed to be called Yax Mutal and was the capital of one of the most powerful Mayan kingdoms. Tikal reached its peak during the classic period between to BC. There is evidence that Tikal came to conquer Teotihuacan in the fourth century BC. Many of the surviving elements today include a meter high tower, large royal palaces, and a number of pyramids, palaces, residences, administrative buildings, platforms and stelae. This city flourished in a short time of the classic terminal period. This was a city ruled by a local dynasty with lineages of nobility. It is believed that its population was composed of 10, people in the city and 5, to 7, in its periphery. At present the archaeological site comprises structures including temples and palaces. This site is known to be one of the Mayan capitals of the postclassic period. The largest structures were located around a square. It is believed that it was originally known as Chetumal. For the postclassic period, the city reached its largest number of inhabitants with 6, people. References Canadian Museum of History. Capital of Maya Civilization. The Maya civilization, cities of the Maya.

Chapter 6 : Olmec Civilization

Which of the following devices did the ancient Maya build in order to trap silt carried by the numerous rivers passing through the Mesoamerican lowlands? terrace The Maya calendar interwove a solar year of days and a ceremonial calendar of _____ days.

Description[edit] Mexico , probably Guerrero, Olmec Blood-letter Handle, BC Bloodletting was performed by piercing a soft body part, generally the tongue or penis , and scattering the blood or collecting it on paper, which was subsequently burned. Under some circumstances, a rope with attached thorns or obsidian flakes would be pulled through the tongue or earlobes. Jade or stone spines and teeth have been found in the archaeological record. Some of these jade artifacts have rather dull points but might have been used once the initial cut was made, or might purely be ritualistic objects not used in actual bloodletting. For example, drawing blood from the genitals, especially the male sex organs, would be done with the intent of increasing or representing human fertility. Lintel 24 at Yaxchilan , depicting Lady Xoc drawing a barbed rope through her tongue. Ritualized bloodletting was typically performed by elites, settlement leaders, and religious figures e. The rituals were enacted on the summits of pyramids or on elevated platforms that were usually associated with broad and open plazas or courtyards where the masses could congregate and view the bloodletting. While usually carried out by a ruling male , prominent females are also known to have performed the act. In front of her, her husband and the ruler of Yaxchilan , Shield Jaguar , is shown holding a torch. Maya mythology and Maya religion Among all the Mesoamerican cultures, sacrifice, in whatever form, was a deeply symbolic and highly ritualized activity with strong religious and political significance. Various kinds of sacrifice were performed within a range of sociocultural contexts and in association with a variety of activities, from mundane everyday activities to those performed by the elites and ruling lineages with the aim of maintaining social structure. The social structure was maintained by showing that rulers blood sacrifice to the gods showed the power they had. Its ability of bloodletting to do this is based on two intertwined concepts that are prevalent in the Maya belief system. The first is the notion that the gods had given life to humankind by sacrificing parts of their own bodies. The second is the central focus of their mythology on human blood , which signified life among the Maya. Within their belief system, human blood was partially made up of the blood of the gods, who sacrificed their own divine blood in creating life in humans. Thus, in order to continually maintain the order of their universe, the Maya believed that blood had to be given back to the gods. The rulers are giving their blood to empower the gods in return for giving them life. Olmec-style jadeite "spoon", believed to be a perforator, from Guerrero. However, solid evidence for its practice exists in the jade and ceramic replicas of stingray spines and shark teeth as well as representations of such paraphernalia on monuments and stelae [6] and in iconography. Kings performed bloodletting at every major political event. Building dedications, burials, marriages , and births all required bloodletting. Although most understood the religious significance of the rites, such idolatry merely confirmed the need for rapid conversion to Christianity. Many also confused genital bloodletting with circumcision , not least because they believed Indians were descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. At other times they perforated their cheeks or the lower lip; again they made cuts in parts of the body, or pierced the tongue crossways and passed stalks through, causing extreme pain; again they hewed at the superfluous part of the penis, leaving the flesh in the form of two floppy ears.

Chapter 7 : About Tikal and Mayan Culture

Some of the Ceremonial centers Mayas Main are Cival, Blue River, Coba, Caracol, El Pilar and Motul de San JosÃ©, among others.. The Mayan civilization Was a culture that flourished in the region of Mesoamerica With about 8 million inhabitants.

Tweet on Twitter What strikes a visitor to the Riviera Maya, is an exuberance of light and colors, among the most beautiful beaches anywhere. Tulum is well known to the tourists flocking to the Riviera Maya year round. Along the coast and not far inland, are remains of Maya cities and towns, witnesses to a dynamic culture spanning thousands of generations. The Castillo is the elevated structure below, in the middle of the promontory. People living outside the city walls took refuge inside when warned of assault by raiders. The heart of the city below is where secular-religious leaders conducted extensive political and trade negotiations, extending inland on the peninsula and beyond. Tulum historic timeline spreads over years, from the early to the late Post Classic. The heart of the city above , is referred to as the Inner Precinct, with El Castillo center , the Temple of the Descending God far left , and the Temple of the Initial Series far right. El Castillo is the main structure in the Inner Precinct, the most exclusive and restricted area of the city, enclosed by a non-defensive wall, with three access gates. Three other types of structures seen above are: From the later are remains of foundations of perishable structures, mostly used for ceremonial events. One of the two steps platform Str. Over the doorway is a niche with a stucco figure representing the Descending aka Diving God, identified as God. The god is shown with his feet up, in a diving stance, unique in the pantheon of Maya deities. Similar figures of the Descending God, are found throughout the city, carved on plaster or stone on buildings, and painted on ceramics. E is the Maya counterpart of Centeotl of Central Mexico. The concept of a god descending from the sky is a common belief and symbol in Mesoamerica. Located close to the northeast door of the city is the Casa del Cenote Str. They are an important water supply in a region practically devoid of surface rivers. It is located outside of the Inner Precinct, and about in the middle of the city. Dated Late post-Classic , at a time when the architectonic Costa Oriental style is found throughout the area. The mythological themes on painted murals represent death, the underworld and re-birth. In its iconographical aspect, the architecture includes niches in which the figure of a deity or lord is shown. Venus and the Sun play key roles in defining characteristics of both art and architecture of the city. The sacred and the profane were intertwined at Tulum, because of its importance as a predominant trade center but, above all, it was a major ceremonial city. The Temple of the Frescos most prominent feature are the masks on its North and South corners believed to represent high members of the nobility or priests, not gods. On its second floor, above the doorway, is seen a niche with the Descending God figure. The palace called Casa de las Columnas Str. The width of the room is the largest in the region, and initially built without column or support. Its flat roof was made of round wood beams is covered with a thick mortar, and a coat of stucco on the inside. At a late date, when the roof started to cave in, a column was erected to support it. There were moldings with rosettes in the sanctuary, and a niche with the omni-present figure of the Descending God over the doorway. The Great Palace Str. Its four columns portico entrance open to a walled compound. It is a semi-circular structure with a small altar. Its footprint and the altar point to its dedication to Ik, god of the wind and breath, since they are both the same; breath is to be understood as both the first and the last. On the second floor at the back of El Castillo, are two small openings looking out to sea, in direct line of sight with the break in the coral reef off shore, and the landing on the beach below; each held colorful markers. For daylight navigation, banners or the smoke of fires, were probably added on the roof to show wind direction. The fires were lit in large ceramic urns, kept close to each of the openings, to focus the light of the flames eastward, as beacons to guide travelers toward the channel, and through the barrier reef for safe landing. The Wall of the city was made of stones on its North, South and West sides. On the seashore side, beside the rocky cliff, were added palisades of tree trunks on the North and South side for defense. The one room structure holds a small altar at the back. Its unique crest on the roof underline the fact that it was built earlier than the oldest structure in the city, possibly Early Classic or before. Remains of ceramic point to the veneration of Ek Chua and other deities, protectors of

sea traders and travelers, and was both a shrine and a coastal marker. It is now time to relax and enjoy the beauty of the Caribbean coast, its great beaches, blue waters and the warm Mexican hospitality.

Chapter 8 : The 16 Best Mayan Ruins to Explore (From Actun Tunichil Muknal to Xunantunich)

Maya cities usually had a ceremonial and administrative centre surrounded by a vast irregular sprawl of residential complexes. The centres of all Maya cities featured sacred precincts, sometimes separated from nearby residential areas by walls. [9].

The Mayan History The Mayans have a very historical inheritance in the many ruins scattered throughout the world. Tourists from all over are experiencing first hand a part of history that just inexplicably baffles the mind, as even today, historians cant seem to agree on the precise cause of the demise of the Maya Indians. There are various tribes that comprise the Mayan community, of which their language is still spoken, although English is also practiced. Origination All inhabitants of the Americas are thought to have originally migrated across the Bering Straits when the level of the oceans dropped enough to form a land bridge between Alaska and Siberia. These foraging nomads migrated throughout North America and eventually down through Central and South America. The archaeological record shows evidence of the first Maya people as early as BC. These pioneers descended into the Copan Valley in Honduras from either the Guatemala highlands or another nearby mountainous region and made temporary camps in the known Maya region. Early Maya inhabitants hunted local game and developed agricultural subsistence techniques until about BC. Around this time, the first true farmers of the Maya people built permanent residences in the valley Schele and Freidel About BC, these people had spread out over the highland areas of Central America and soon reached a population size where they began to form small settlements and domesticate plants. Send money online to Honduras with Xoom. Archaeologists are able to date finds and sites of the Mayan civilization using artifacts of ceramic, stone, shells and bone. They also use the Mayans own calendar. The Mayans used a rather complex calendar system. Monumental stone inscriptions were carved using a hieroglyphic script and a method of reckoning the passage of time called the Long Count. The most striking feature of this system is that the Mayans dated events to the exact day. Archaeologists have devised numerous correlations with our own Gregorian calendar to accurately place any event recorded in these Mayan inscriptions. Devised by three well known archaeologists, the most accepted interpretation of the Mayan dates is known as the G-M-T correlation. Using these dates, Archaeologists have been able to decipher three major periods of Mayan Civilization - the Preclassic, Classic and Postclassic periods. For perspective, the flowering of the Mayan civilization corresponds to the later years of the Roman Empire Chronology This chronology of the Mayan civilization is rather simple. Simply put, it started in the Preclassic period, rose to dominance in the Classic period, and declined and disappeared in the Postclassic period. Preclassic Period The beginning of Mayan life in Central America known as Mesoamerica to archaeologists occurred around BC, when wandering nomads from the north found they could settle down and domesticate plants. These early crops consisted of corn, beans and other plants. The domestication of plants required that people stay in one location to tend the fields. Thus were born the first Mayan settlements. With the growth of settlements and farming, so came innovations to make life easier. Some of the more important inventions include pottery vessels for storage, cooking and serving of food. Because of its weight and fragility, pottery is not often used by nomads. The presence of pottery normally indicates a tendency to long term settlement. Much of what archaeologists know of the early Preclassic period in Belize comes from the Mayan site of Cuello, outside of Orange Walk Town. Radiocarbon dating from a series of buildings and trash dumps archaeologists love places where people threw their trash reveal occupation from about BC. These structures were small buildings with clay platforms and fired clay hearths. Other items of preclassic origin that were identified include stone utensils for grinding corn and a fluted stone projectile point. During the preclassic time, corn progressed from being a small cobbled, low yielding crop to larger cobbled, high-yielding varieties. The farmers were learning how to maximize their efforts, and passed on what they learned to succeeding generations. With the improvement in farming, the invention of more sophisticated tools, and the growth in size of settlements, the Maya culture became associated with a civilization with larger cities containing ceremonial centers. As time progressed, the sites became more numerous and larger. The sites exhibited more organization with public buildings, elaborate burials, and jade jewelry. Jade became a

spectacular marker of the elite, both in quantity owned and in the quality of the workmanship. Near the end of the Preclassic Period, trading flourished as networks formed between the growing settlements. Most of the major ceremonial centers were started about this time. Mesoamerica became adorned with massive, ornate and brightly colored architecture. Exquisite works of art and advances in astronomy and mathematics are hallmarks of this Period. This was the age of the development of one of the most sophisticated systems of writing ever devised in the Western Hemisphere. The Classic period began with the carving of the first hieroglyphic dates on Mayan stelae in A. Most of the greatest ceremonial centers in Mesoamerica - Tikal, Caracol, Palenque - came to their greatest glory during the Classic period. And for some yet unknown reason, all were abandoned or far into decline within a span of a few years near the end of the ninth century. Much of what Archaeologists know of the Mayan Civilization comes from archeological work done on Classic Period sites. Scientists originally constructed a model of Mayan society as a ceremonial center supported by widely spaced subsistence communities. But intense study on the agricultural practices revealed that the Maya used highly sophisticated techniques to feed a dense and growing population surrounding the ceremonial centers. These practices included terracing of hillsides and river banks. Terracing allowed intense agriculture of land otherwise unsuitable for crops. Using drainage ditches and irrigation, Mayan farmers maintained corn fields and harvested such diverse crops as manioc, sweet potatoes, and beans. Of great importance was the ramon nut. Large underground chambers were constructed to store the ramon nuts for long periods of time. Some archaeologists theorize that these storage chambers were used in time of famine. The Classic Maya augmented their starch diet of vegetables and nuts with animal protein. The main source of meat came from hunting the abundant white tailed deer, along with the small brocket deer and two species of wild pig. The Classic Maya also collected turtles and large numbers of freshwater snails. Emphasis traditionally has been on the large ceremonial centers of the time. But recently, archaeologists have taken a close look at the entire social structure, and have concentrated on the small Mayan settlements and the rural farmers which supported the Mayan Civilization through the production of food. These subsistence farmers lived in dwellings very similar to the Maya of today. Most homes were constructed of perishable material harvested from the forests. The structure of Mayan society centered around a major ceremonial site. A regional trading system would integrate the products of outlying areas with minor ceremonial sites and eventually with the major ceremonial center. Well developed causeways, called sacbeobs "white roads" from the plastered surfaces radiated out from the major sites in all directions toward the minor sites. The Classic Period chronology has been developed based on the rise, flourishing, and steady decline of the Mayan Civilization. Some archaeologists also base these divisions of the period on the influences of major ceremonial centers on all of Mesoamerica and the Mayan Civilization as a whole. There is evidence that the Maya utilized terracing and elaborate water management systems during this time. The evidence of terracing suggests that the Maya began to cultivate even the steepest slopes. The spectacular growth of the Early and Middle Classic Period was followed by a sudden collapse in the early 9th century. The collapse signalled a massive depopulation of the interior regions of the area, while those sites near water, such as Lamanai, appear to have survived into the Postclassic period. Postclassic Period Archaeologists continually debate over what triggered the rise of the Mayan Civilization. But even greater debate ensues over why this once great civilization collapsed. The period that followed the abandonment of the rainforest centers is known as the Postclassic Period. This Period closes upon the Spanish Conquest in the mid-sixteenth century. The Post Classic period is characterized by a lack of emphasis on tall pyramids and elaborate structures. Instead, the Maya concentrated on ground level buildings and created their art on stucco which quickly erodes. In fact much less is known of the Maya in the Post Classic Period than in the Classic Period because of the lack of art, artifacts and structures from the Post Classic Period. Many archaeologists agree that the collapse of the Mayan civilization was triggered by a number of factors. Population was probably one of these. According to researchers, parts of the Mayan region were sustaining nearly people per square mile - a heavy density for an agriculturally based society. Other factors could have been malnutrition and disease. Studies of human bones and teeth from Late Classic burial mounds have found strong evidence of these factors, including syphilis and other communicable diseases. The social gulf between the ruling elite and the common people is another factor that archaeologists feel contributed to the decline of the civilization.

Some researchers feel that the breakdown of trade contributed greatly to the collapse. Archeologists believe that "realms" may have been established where outlying districts provided items of trade. These items were brought to a central location for redistribution. These economic links become vulnerable during times of stress and change. Other scientists believe that climate contributed to the diminishing Mayan population. The Mayans had settled in the lowlands around BC and began practicing large-scale farming as early as BC. By the beginning of the medieval climate optimum in AD , the population was nearly 14 million, making it one of the largest centers of civilization anywhere. But the thriving Mayan cities began to experience diminished long-term rainfall patterns. Dry conditions began in and, after a year wet period, drought again set in about . Another drought followed in . The boom-and-bust cycles of rainy and dry periods contributed to eras of both growth and decline. Therefore, some believe that technology, population sizes, and agricultural intensity overwhelmed the land. Yields declined with the dry conditions and these structural incongruities led to ongoing wars between Mayan city-states that eventually contributed to their collapse. The causes of the Mayan collapse are obviously complex and varied, and not yet well understood.

Chapter 9 : Maya city - Wikipedia

Scientists originally constructed a model of Mayan society as a ceremonial center supported by widely spaced subsistence communities. But intense study on the agricultural practices revealed that the Maya used highly sophisticated techniques to feed a dense and growing population surrounding the ceremonial centers.