



The Maya



Geography Affects Early Maya

- **The Maya civilization developed in the lowlands of Mesoamerica around 1000 BC.**
- **Thick forests covered the area, so the Maya had to cut down trees to farm.**
- **The forest was also a source of many resources, including animals for food and wood for building materials.**

Maya Civilization



Obsidian, valued for its sharp edges and considered sacred by the Maya, was mined in the mountains and traded throughout the Maya world.

Jade was mined in the mountains and traded to lowland cities.

Maya

- **The Maya lived in villages.**
- **The Maya began trading such items as woven cloth and obsidian, a sharp, glasslike volcanic rock.**
- **By AD 200 the Maya were building the first large cities in the Americas.**



Palenque



The ancient Maya city of Palenque was a major power on the border between the Maya highlands and lowlands. Its great temples and plazas were typical of the Classic Age of Maya civilization.

Maya Classic Age

- **Maya civilization reached its height between AD 250 and 900, a period called the Classic Age.**
- **During this time there were more than more than 40 Maya cities. Each city had populations of 5,000 to 50,000 people.**
- **The Maya traded for things that could not be found in their own part of Mesoamerica.**
- **The lowlands had many crops and wood products. The highlands had valuable stones like jade and obsidian.**

Maya Classic Age

- **The Maya built large stone pyramids, temples, and palaces. Some of these buildings honored local kings. A temple built in the city of Palenque honored the king Pacal .**
- **Artists decorated the temple with paintings and carvings celebrating his achievements as ruler. The Maya built canals to bring water to the cities. They shaped hillsides into flat terraces so they could grow crops on them.**
- **The Maya also paved the cities' central plazas. Most cities had a ball court to watch a game the Maya had learned from the Olmec.**

Pacal

603-683



Pacal became king of the Maya city of Palenque when he was just 12 years old. As king, Pacal led many important community events, such as religious dances and public meetings. When he died he was buried at the bottom of the pyramid-shaped Temple of the Inscriptions.

Government

- **The Maya did not have a central government.**
- **Kings governed each city separately. Cities often fought each other over territory and resources.**
- **This warfare was violent and destructive. Some historians believe warfare led to the end of the Maya civilization.**

Maya Civilization Declines

- **Maya civilization began to collapse in the 900s.**
- **They stopped building large buildings and left the cities for the countryside.**
- **Historians are not sure why this happened, but there are several theories.**



Maya Writing Sample



Ruins of Uxmal and Kabah

Maya Civilization Declines

- **Some historians believe that Maya farmers kept planting the same crop over and over, which weakened the soil and caused drought.**
- **This may have caused more competition and war between the cities. Others think that the Maya kings made their people build huge temples or farm for them. The people got tired of working for the kings, so they rebelled.**
- **There were probably many factors that led to the decline of the Maya civilization.**