

# The Ancient Maya Civilisation

**Mesoamerica** 2000 BCE to 1500AD

**An informative book**



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# The Ancient Maya



## Who?

The ancient Maya were a civilisation that lived between 2000 BCE to around 1500AD. They lived in Mesoamerica, which is now known as Southern Mexico and Central America (above). They were an extremely successful civilisation and were highly advanced in writing, art and science for a people living back then. Temples and pyramids can still be seen today in the jungles of Central America.

Mesoamerica was made up of mountains, coasts and rainforests. The lowlands were near the sea and the highlands were in the mountains. It was not until 250 BCE that the Mayas began to settle around the lowlands more.

## Modern Mayas

Today, there are millions of people who are descendants of the ancient Maya living in Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico. Their ancient Mayan heritage is still present in the languages that they speak and they are not completely westernised, despite the Spanish conquest of the Yucatan in the late 1600s.

# Hieroglyphs



The Maya writing system is made up of logograms and phonetic symbols. Phonetic symbols are pictures that represent a sound made in the language.



It is believed that there are over 1,000 Mayan glyphs, though no more than 500 were ever used together in one single Mayan language, as there were many.



## The Olmecs

The Olmecs were a people who lived hundreds of years before the Maya, in Mesoamerica. It is possible that the ancient Maya writing system was influenced by the writing of the Olmecs. The Spanish conquest of the Maya brought the use of the hieroglyphs to an end.

Scripts have been found written on stone monuments, tablets and ceramic pottery. There have also been examples found on a form of paper, made from the bark of fig trees.

**Above:** Hieroglyphs in stone  
**Right:** an ancient Maya calendar with writing around the outside.

## Calendar

The Mayas had managed to measure their years pretty accurately, as their calendars show. They used two different calendars; one for religion, which had 260 days a year and one for farming, which had 365 days a year.

