

Mayan Religion

Name _____

The Maya were an indigenous people who lived throughout Mexico and Central America from about 800 B.C. to 1100 A.D. The Mayan society was thought to be the most complex and sophisticated in the world at the time. The Maya were responsible for incredible achievements in astronomy, agriculture, math, engineering and technology. Although there are several theories on why they eventually faded into history, historians and archaeologists still have not come to a consensus.

Mayan culture centered around its gods and religion.

Itzamna – Itzamna was the most important god in Mayan culture. He was the god of fire that created the Earth and who ruled based on his extraordinary knowledge. Itzamna, together with his wife, the goddess Ix Chel, were the parents of all other gods. The Mayans credited Itzamna with giving them writing, calendars, and science. Mayan glyphs often portrayed Itzamna as an elderly man on a throne. Other glyphs depicted him as a two-headed underwater serpent or caiman.

Kukulkan – Kukulkan was the feathered-serpent god. Often depicted as a dragon, he came to prominence in the latter part of Mayan civilization. El Castillo, sometimes called the Pyramid of Kukulkan, is one of the most famous Mayan pyramids. The pyramid was astrologically designed so that a serpent-shaped shadow descended upon one of the pyramid's staircases during the spring and fall equinox.

Bolon Tzacab – Also known as Huracan, Bolon Tzacab was the god of farming, storms, wind, and fire. Mayans believed he caused flooding when angered. He was thought to have lived in the windy mists above such floodwaters. His name meant “one leg.” He was often portrayed as having one human leg and one serpent leg. He is also depicted with a leaf protruding for him nostril.

Kings – Mayan city-states, or population centers, were controlled by kings who often legitimized their power by building pyramids. Kings were expected to exercise military prowess by carrying out raids against rival city-states. Mayan kings took on god-like personas and were responsible for ensuring that the gods received the prayers and the praise they deserved.

Mayan Priests – Priests in Mayan culture were high-ranking officials who served as intermediaries between people and the gods. They also taught reading and writing and performed religious ceremonies and sacrifices, studied and interpreted astrology, and kept track of family lineages among other things.

1. Which of the following were not associated with serpents?

- A. Mayan priests
- B. Kukulcan
- C. Itzamna
- D. Bolon Tzacab

2. To which of the following questions would “served as intermediaries between the people and gods” be the answer?

- A. What was the only function of the Mayan priests?
- B. What was the primary function of the Mayan kings?
- C. What was one of the functions of the Mayan Priests?
- D. What was the function of Bolon Tzacab?

3. In Mayan civilization, a hurricane that hit Mexico would likely be attributed to the anger of ...

- A. Mayan Kings
- B. Kukulcan
- C. Itzamna
- D. Bolon Tzacab

4. Which of the following could replace “exercise military prowess” in the following sentence?

Kings were expected to exercise military prowess by carrying out raids against rival city-states.

- A. Show violence
- B. Attack enemies
- C. Show skill in warfare
- D. Make their city-states rich

5. Which is NOT true about Itzamna?

- A. He and his wife were parents to the other gods
- B. He was the god of water who created Earth
- C. He was sometimes portrayed as an old man on a throne
- D. He ruled through based on his incredible wisdom

6. Which question is NOT answered in the passage?

- A. Where is El Castillo located?
- B. Who gave the Maya writing, calendars, and science?
- C. What were two depictions of Itzamna?
- D. Besides warfare, what were the Mayan kings responsible for?

7. What did Kukulcan and Bolon Tzacab have in common?

- A. They both were gods of farming
- B. They each had one human leg
- C. Their parents were Itzamna and Ix Chel
- D. They both carried out raids against rival city-states