About Tikal And Mayan Culture Essay, Research Paper

Map

Source

Deep within the

jungles of Mexico and Guatemala and extending into the limestone shelf of the Yucatan

peninsula lie the mysterious temples and pyramids of the Maya. While Europe was still in

the midst of the Dark Ages, these amazing people had mapped the heavens, evolved the only

true writing system native to the Americas and were masters of mathematics. They invented

the calendars we use today. Without metal tools, beasts of burden or even the wheel they

were able to construct vast cities across a huge jungle landscape with an amazing degree

of architectural perfection and variety. Their legacy in stone, which has survived in a

spectacular fashion at places such as Palenque, Tikal, Tulum, Chich?n Itz?, Copan and

Uxmal, lives on as do the seven million descendants of the classic Maya civilization.

The Maya are probably the best-known of the

classical civilizations of Mesoamerica. Originating in the Yucatan around 2600 B.C., they

rose to prominence around A.D. 250 in present-day southern Mexico, Guatemala, northern

Belize and western Honduras. Building on the inherited inventions and ideas of earlier

civilizations such as the Olmec, the Maya developed astronomy, calendrical systems and

hieroglyphic writing. The Maya were noted as well for elaborate and highly decorated

ceremonial architecture, including temple-pyramids, palaces and observatories, all built

without metal tools. They were also skilled farmers, clearing large sections of tropical

rain forest and, where groundwater was scarce, building sizable underground reservoirs for

the storage of rainwater. The Maya were equally skilled as weavers and potters, and

cleared routes through jungles and swamps to foster extensive trade networks with distant

peoples.

Around 300 B.C., the Maya adopted a

hierarchical system of government with rule by nobles and kings. This civilization

developed into highly structured kingdoms during the Classic period, A.D. 200-900.

Their society consisted of many

independent states, each with a rural farming community and large urban sites built around

ceremonial centers. It started to decline around A.D. 900 when – for reasons which are

still largely a mystery – the southern Maya abandoned their cities. When the northern Maya

were integrated into the Toltec society by A.D. 1200, the Maya dynasty finally came to a

close, although some peripheral centers continued to thrive until the Spanish Conquest in

the early sixteenth century. (Source)