

MAYAN RELIGION

Religion was important to every part of Mayan life. The Mayas worshipped many different gods. Each day, month, city, and occupation had its own special god or goddess. The Mayas had a variety of religious festivals and celebrations. Most of these celebrations included human sacrifice.

The Mayan empire was divided into many city-states. Each city-state had its own ruler. His name was *halach uinic*. This meant "the true or real man." The Mayas believed *halach uinic* was a living god. He ruled until his death. At his death, his oldest son became the next *halach uinic*. If the *halach uinic* did not have a son, his brother would rule. If he did not have a brother, the ruler's council elected a member of his family to serve. Some historians believe that the *halach uinic* also served as the high priest during religious ceremonies.

The *halach uinic* dressed in elaborate and colorful clothes. He also wore a very large head-dress. Temple wall paintings show him with large ear decorations, crossed eyes, and many tattoos.

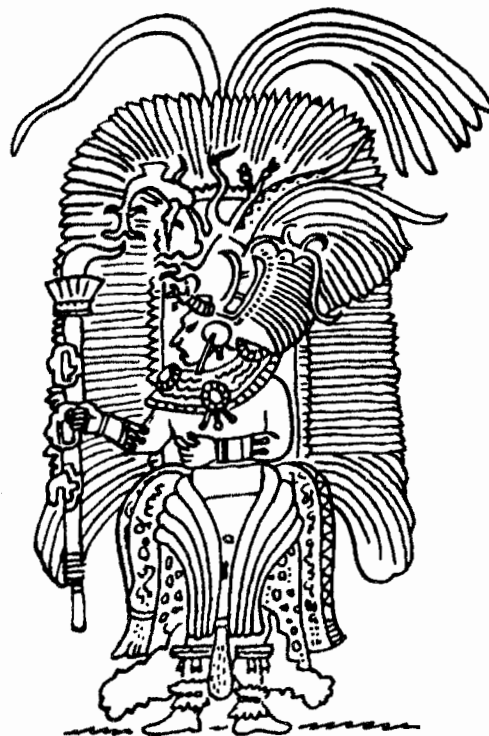
Many other priests served with the *halach uinic*. These priests, named *ahkin*, performed many duties. They had the knowledge of mathematics and astronomy. Some of the *ahkin* were prophets. Some of them performed the religious sacrifices. Other *ahkin* performed medical rituals. The Mayas believed that only the priests could explain the mysteries of life and death. The Mayas believed that the earth was flat. They thought it was on the back of a crocodile that floated in a large pond. At another time they believed the earth was the floor of a lizard house.

The Mayas' religion taught that there were 13 layers of heavens above the earth. They also believed nine underworlds were below. They thought that they lived in the fifth creation of the world. The previous four worlds had each been destroyed by a great flood. At the beginning of the fifth world, the gods created humans from corn.

Many of the Mayan religious ceremonies included gifts and sacrifices to the various gods and goddesses. The Mayas believed the gods would give favors to them in return for prayers, offerings, and sacrifices. The sacrifices included valuable gifts, their own blood, and human sacrifices.

In many ceremonies, the priests cut themselves to get blood to present to the gods. The Mayas had three methods of giving the human sacrifices. Often, the priests took the victim to the altar at the temple. Then the priests cut the heart out of the living victim and presented it to the god.

In another method, the priests tied the victim to a wooden pole. Then they threw spears and arrows at the victim's chest in the area of the heart.



Each Mayan city-state had a ruler called the *halach uinic*. He may have also served as the high priest during religious ceremonies.

Name _____ Date _____

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. What did people call the ruler of each city-state?

2. What did the Mayas believe the halach uinic was?

3. What may the halach uinic also have served as?

4. What was the Mayan name for the priests?

5. What did the Mayas believe about the earth?

6. What did the Mayas believe the earth rode on the back of?

7. According to the Mayan religion, what were humans made from?

8. How many underworlds did the Mayas believe there were below the surface of the earth?

9. Briefly describe one method of human sacrifice.

10. What would happen if a sacrificial human were thrown into a well and didn't die?