

## The Lost Civilization

In the introduction to this text, the author brings about the idea of civilizations: their definition, creation, and inherent properties. "Civilizations are those relatively rare human societies that achieve unusually high degrees of cultural complexity"(Introduction xi). We are part of a civilization that has much to learn from those of the past. Living in this society filled with issues such as overpopulation, scarcity of resources, and exploitation of the environment, it would be wise to look to our predecessors and learn what we can from their successes and downfalls. In this text, the Maya civilization of Guatemala and British Honduras is explored. The Maya civilization is famous for being shrouded in mystery and having evidence of an extremely advanced and intellectual society. However, one of the most intriguing aspects of this civilization was its utterly devastating and lasting downfall.

Arguably the most important aspects of Maya culture were their farming techniques, economic system, social and political organization, religion, and intellectual development. In order to support a population as dense as is predicted for the Mayans, archeologists speculate that they utilized a slash and burn farming technique, which is used by modern-day Mayans. However, logistically, this method alone, although it seems to be the most productive for the area, could not have been adequate. Thus it is theorized that the ancient Mayans employed additional techniques, such as the cropping of their seasonal swamps via raised soil ridges to keep crops out of the water. The economic system of the Maya has parallels to our own. Instead of family-based self-sufficiency of goods, findings hint at a more specialized and developed system where different villages may have produced a specific good and traded with others.

The Mayan social system can only be guessed at by looking at existing structures and art. The patterns of housing mounds suggests that extended family living was the standard. It is also a possibility that larger housing groups represent certain clans or villages within the civilization and that these people functioned as units with it's own services and administration. Religious participation was one of the keystones that "bound social classes into a cooperative, functioning system and provided pleasure and entertainment..." The Mayans believed the world to be full of supernatural beings and forces, and were scholars in fields such as astronomy and mathematics.

Looking to the past and recognizing the great achievements of the Mayans and the structure of their advanced civilization can leave one in awe. However, despite all of their glory, one of the most prominent aspects of their cultural history is their rapid and definite fall. The Mayan civilization was extinguished so utterly and completely that it is believed that they expanded far too quickly and tremendously to support themselves. Modern-day projections of our civilization's population growth, use of natural resources, and generation of pollutants leaves us facing a similar fate in the not too near future.

