

Rivalizing for the title of most advanced civilization in the world: the mayan ci...

[History](#)



The highly advanced citizens of the ancient Mayan civilization used hieroglyphics to keep important historical records, made many advancements in mathematics, and had a highly accurate astronomy system. Throughout their years of existence, the Mayans proved to be one of the most advanced civilizations ever recorded. Their hieroglyphic writing skills have been documented to be some of the most sophisticated in all of ancient America. The Mayans also had an amazing understanding of mathematics and the workings of the universe. They have, through these things and more, to be on of the most advanced ancient civilizations in all of the world.

The Mayan civilization had a rich and interesting history. The history of the Mayans has been classified into five historical periods. The first is the Formative Period, which lasted from 1500 BC to approximately 150 AD and saw the rapid development of its early people and the erection of its first temples. Another important period was the Classic Period. This period lasted from about 250 to 900 AD and included the rise royal rule, commerce, urban centers and ceremony. The Postclassic Period occurred from 900 to 1500 AD and witnessed the fall of the Mayan civilization from its "Golden Age". The Mayan history is a remarkable documentation of a extremely advanced civilization.

The Mayan hieroglyphic system of writing stands as one of the most remarkable displays of the advancements of a civilization in the history of the Americas due to its complexity in design and usage. Their system of writing was the only one developed before the arrival of Columbus and has been noted as the most advanced system developed in all of ancient

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America. The Mayan writing was based on independent sections called glyphs, which many times appear quite flashy and complex to outsiders eyes. Through research by scholars, about 800 glyphs have been discovered , which exceeds the number of signs needed for an alphabet (about 30) or a syllabary (about 125) . Their system, on the other hand, ceased to include enough sign for a logographic script, as in the Chinese. Therefore, it worked much like other hieroglyphic writing systems of that time. The overall form and usage of the writing system proved to be an important tool used by the Mayans.

Their hieroglyphic writing system appears in many different forms. The Mayans have produced approximately 5, 000 hieroglyphic writings in many different forms and on such things as alters, ornaments, pottery vessels, building walls and inside caves and tombs. They have also inscribed on stalae, which are slabs of stone which tell important historical facts, and in books, called codices. Some of the inscriptions that have been found have been deciphered to discover that they document the lineage and accomplishments of the rulers of the great Mayan cities. The three of four remaining books are thought, by scholars, to deal with the topics of astrology, astronomy and religion. On the other hand, the codices that have been destroyed probably dealt with many subjects, such as history, medicine, genealogies, divination and mythology. The forms of the Mayan written language further instill the advancement of this great civilization.

The form of the glyphs themselves was very complex. Some of the more elaborate ones were visibly pictures of natural things and yet some were

abstract in design. A group of glyphs were put together in glyph groups. The glyph groups are broken down into the main sign and affixes, which are broken down again into prefixes, superfixes, subfixes and postfixes. These are named according to their position in relation to the main sign. The complexity of the glyphs, therefore, increases the proof of the civilization's advancement.

The Mayans have proven their advancement even further through their amazing understanding of the concept of zero. During the late Preclassic period, the Mayans "invented" the concept of zero or nothing. This is an amazing task due to the fact that no other civilization, at that time, had started using this concept. The concept of zero is one of the two basics that are employed in the Mayan mathematical system. Zero furthermore increased their understanding of the universe and, therefore, caused them to become even more advanced.

The Mayan numerical system is quite amazing, because of its simplicity in design. The only three notations used in this system are a dot, a horizontal bar and a shell design. Therefore, to write large numbers the Mayans employ a second key principle to their system. That is relating the size of the number with its position. Unlike modern day civilizations, which use this same concept in a horizontal method, the Mayan used it in a vertical system of notation. The system worked under the principle that every level that the number moved vertically it would be multiplied by twenty. For example, the base line would keep its normal value, the second line would be twenty times what was written, the third line would be 400(20 times 20) times what was

written and so on. This means that their system is a vigesimal one, which means that it is based on the number twenty. Using a small number of signs and still containing a variety of uses further show the advancement of the civilization.

One of the ancient Mayan's most advanced skills was their very accurate astronomical observations. An amazing fact about their observations is that they never stopped making them. The accuracy of their findings is quite remarkable, considering that they had not yet discovered glass and, therefore, had no precision instruments. That means they had no clepsydra (water clock), clocks or hourglasses. They basically had nothing to tell exact time. Yet, they still calculated the lunar month to be 29.53020 days long, which is only .00039 of a day different from calculations of today. Due to their astronomy, the Mayans knew many things that other civilizations did not, such as the moon and Venus. They also realized that the Morning and Evening Star were the same thing. With these extremely accurate observations, the Mayans created the year consisting of 365 days. These observations helped them create many other beneficial things for their people and civilization.

The Mayan study of astronomy produced a calendar that, to this day, is one of the most accurate ever produced. Their calendar was actually the combination of three other calendars; the Haab, the Tzolkin and the Calendar Round. The Tzolkin, or Sacred Almanac, was 260 days long and was divided into 13 twenty day months. The Haab was 360 days long and was divided into 18 twenty day months plus an additional month of five days, which were

unnamed. These two calendars are then combined in an interlocking fashion to form the Calendar Round. This interlocking cycle repeats every 52 years, or 18, 980 days. Every Mayan date had two names, one in the Tzolkin and one in the Haas. Therefore, every one of the Calendar Round's days has a different combination of day name, day number, month name and month number. Throughout their civilization, the calendar proved to be a very useful tool.

The ancient Mayans were the most advanced ancient American civilization ever documented due to their amazing advancements in hieroglyphic writing, mathematics and astronomy. Their workings with hieroglyphics were one of the foundations of all writing systems from that day on. The Mayans astronomical observations are some of the most accurate ever recorded and their calendar is one of the bases of the modern day dating system. Their mathematical systems using the concept of zero show their prowess and understanding of the subject. Therefore, the Mayans are one of the most advanced ancient civilizations ever.