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Ciana Lancaster 11/12/12 Mayan Civilization Religion C & CM The Mayans loved their Gods; to show their love for the Gods, they would sacrifice humans. Maya religion was polytheistic- which means they worshipped or believed in more than one god. The Mayan gods were seen as forces of nature. Since so many Mayans were farmers, most of their gods were related to agriculture. Religion was the most important thing in life to the Mayan people. Just about everything in their lives revolved around religion, “ to the Maya, religion was ultimately their creator and destroyer” (RELIGION AND THE MAYA). Even their architecture reflected their beliefs and ways of life. Mayan religion is not so different from other religions either, in fact, Mayan religion is very similar to Catholicism. Religion was the inspiring force for Mayan Civilization that led to its great achievements. The Mayan Civilization is an ancient Mesoamerican culture. It was one of the most advanced civilizations in the western hemisphere (Mayas). The Mayan Civilization was established around 2600 BCE in Yucatan. Eastern and Southern Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Northern Belize and the western region of Honduras belonged to the Mayan empire during the 3rd century AD (Ancient Mayan Religion). Every part of the Mayan culture- architecture, sculpture, and even the calendars and numbers- reflects Mayan beliefs, even the way the buildings were laid out (The Ancient Maya). “ The Royal Palaces were at the center of the city, representing the earth in the center of the three-level universe. In the north, which was associated with the heavens and dead rulers, were the shrines and tombs. Between the center and north was the ball court, the doorway between worlds” (The Ancient Maya). The Mayans built temples and gigantic pyramids made of stone. Mayan pyramids were constructed for religious ceremonies and burial purposes. The Mayans also

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built temples for the moon and the sun. Every fifty-two years, the temples and pyramids were remodeled and rebuilt (Ancient Mayan Religion). A few of the more popular temples are Chichen Itza, Temples of Tikal, and the Temple of Inscription. Mayan religion and Catholicism had many similarities. Both religions had written and oral traditions. Many of their traditions were similar. The Maya had the Popol Vuh, Catholics had the Holy Bible (RELIGION AND THE MAYA). “ Both held elaborate ceremonies which included fasting, penance by bloodletting, and burning incense; both contained sacrifice as a ceremonial component; both believed in an afterlife; and both maintained rules and convictions to guide one’s life by” (RELIGION AND THE MAYA). The Popol Vuh is the Mayan version of the Bible. The original Popol Vuh was most likely written in hieroglyphic form. It would have had “ illustrations and charts that contained systematic accounts of cycles in astronomical and earthly events that served as a complex navigation system for those who wished to see and move beyond the present” (RELIGION AND THE MAYA). An unknown person created a Popol Vuh that was alphabetic, it was most likely re-written to prevent this knowledge from being lost (RELIGION AND THE MAYA). The location of the original hieroglyphic Popol Vuh is unknown. Some believe it could have returned to the ancient Maya gods in a cloud of dust, it was destroyed, or it may still be waiting to be discovered (RELIGION AND THE MAYA). Many people believed that it was burned; the majority of Mayan writings were burned by church officials in order to “ win favor of their God and their king” (RELIGION AND THE MAYA). The hieroglyphs were not only in books, they were all over the land. Inside the monstrous temples, hieroglyphics are carved into the walls. These hieroglyphics are a type of writing to record astronomical observations and calendrical calculations.

They also recorded historical and genealogical information (Mayas). Mayan hieroglyphs were a mixture of glyphs that represent complete words and glyphs that represent sounds, which were combined to form complete words. They were a pictorial form of writing (Mayas). Mayan hieroglyphs were similar to the Roman alphabet, except, for the Mayans, each symbol was a syllable and there were 800 of them. “ Scribes carved hieroglyphs on stone stelae, altars, wooden lintels, and roof beams, or painted them on ceramic vessels and in books made of bark paper” (Mayas). The hieroglyphics have helped us understand and learn about the Mayans a great deal. All the Mayan Gods had their own individual traits but they were also connected, coming from a powerful spiritual force. The gods could be kind to humans, but they could also be vicious or destructive. The Maya believed the only way to save themselves and their world was to soothe the gods by performing rituals and giving them offerings. Mayans would communicate with the Gods through prayers, sacrifices and visions. Many Mayan Gods were seen as forces of nature. The Maya people were farmers which means many of the Gods were agricultural. The Gods were portrayed as men, women, animals or creatures that looked like a mixture between a person and an animal. At one time, the Mayans believed that all of the gods were part of just one spiritual force (The Ancient Maya). It was as though each God was many gods at the same time. Itzamna was the reptile god: he was the high god of the Mayans. Itzamna is also known as Hunab Ku, the chief god. Hunab Ku was the creator of the world; he was considered too far above men to figure in worship (Mayas). He was worshiped especially by the priests, and he appears to have been the patron deity of the royal lineages (Mayas). Hunab Ku was more important as Itzamna. Itzamna was the lord of the

heavens and the lord of day and night. The Mayans thought of him as many things. Itzamna was usually thought of as their first priest, the inventor of writing, and the god of medicine (Mayan Religion). Itzamna was sometimes identified as a crocodile, a bird, a tree, or an elder with no teeth and a round disk on her forehead- the disk was believed to be a mirror that was used for telling the future (The Ancient Maya). Chac was the rain God. He was a friendly god associated with creation and life (The Ancient Maya). Since rain was essential for growing corn, Chac was one of the most important gods- especially to the ordinary Maya farmers (The Ancient Maya). The Mayan farmers counted on Chac to bring them rain and a good crop, so Maya farmers were especially kind to him. Chac was often represented in art with a reptile face and fangs. Sometimes Chac would be carrying a lightning ax (Mayan Religion). Yum Kaax was the god of corn. Yum Kaax was thought of as a friendly god. He was another very important God to the Mayan farmers. Yum Kaax was believed to be the father of the Hero Twins (Mayan Religion). Yum Kaax has always been shown as a young man with an ear of corn sprouting from his head- it looks similar to a head dress (The Ancient Maya). The female ideal body for the Mayans is based on the form of this young deity. This is demonstrated in their artwork (The Maya Civilization). Ix Chel was a rainbow deity. She was one of the few Gods that was seen as a woman. She was known as the rainbow goddess and was associated with healing, childbirth, weaving, and foretelling the future (Mayan Religion). Ix Chel is also known as the Moon Goddess, Water Goddess, Fertility Goddess, and the Earth Goddess (Mayas). Ix Chel was mostly worshipped by women (Mayas). Ix Chel also had a negative side: she was associated with snakes and destruction, the island of Cozumel off the eastern coast of Yucatán was

a center of devotion to Ix Chel (The Ancient Maya). The Maya developed the belief that gods controlled events in each day, month, and year. Since the Gods controlled everything, the Mayans felt they had to give offerings to win the god's favor (Mayas). The most essential part of Maya life was to make the gods happy. The Mayans sometimes gave the gods simple offerings, like corn, fruit, or blood. When the Mayans gave gods blood as a simple offering, he obtained the blood by piercing his own lips, tongue, or genitals (Mayas). The Maya offered the gods human sacrifice when they were in need in of help, and to keep the Gods happy and in their favor. The Maya tended not to sacrifice people from their own city. The victims of sacrifice were usually prisoners of war. The Maya also sacrificed criminals and children, usually orphans, whom they brought from cities nearby. They believed in human sacrifice because it was the only way to contact the Gods (The Ancient Maya). Sacrificing lives was the Mayan's way of feeding the gods and receiving their wishes and desires. They feared that if they did not sacrifice humans, they would be severely punished (Mayan Religion - Ancient Mayan Civilization). A victim of sacrifice was usually painted blue and then killed on top of a pyramid, either by being shot full of arrows or by having their arms and legs held while a priest cut open his chest with a sacrificial flint knife, tore out his heart and then proceeded to burn it as an offering to the Gods (Mayas). Often, captured rulers were sacrificed by decapitating them with an axe (Mayas). A group of people called " Mayan Priests" performed the rituals of the Mayan temples. The chief priest held down the victim while another priest cut out his heart. The chief priest was known as " Ah Kin Mai" (Ancient Mayan Religion). The Maya believed that blood opened a pathway between earth, heaven, and hell (A Day With A Maya). According to Classic Mayan

belief, the spirits of the dead Maya lived in Xibalb'á. the lowest underworld. The Mayan people were major believers of the afterlife. Hun Camé ruled the underworld with the help of the lords of death. Hun Camé was the god of death. It is believed that he ruled over all of the other gods (A Day With A Maya). The lords of death, Hun Camé, and some of the ordinary Mayan dead all lived in Xibalb'á. The Mayan people believed that the soul never died, but instead continued on a very dangerous journey through the after world. The Mayans believed in heaven, but thought that it was reserved only for the people that died during childbirth, and also the men and women who were used as sacrifices to the Gods (Mayan Religion - Ancient Mayan Civilization). The Maya people buried their dead with food, drink, and other beautiful objects to give to the gods in the afterlife. The dead then used these objects to bribe Hun Camé to let them pass through Xibalb'á to the Heaven of Dawn, a place where the dead guard their living relatives and to send them rain and prosperity (A Day With A Maya). The Heaven of Dawn is where the people who died during childbirth and sacrifice are. It is said that Hun Camé is very hard to bribe and most Mayans are stuck in Xibalb'á because Hun Camé will not let them through (Mayan Religion — Ancient Mayan Civilization). The Mayans believed that every person had a companion animal spirit. When someone is born, the same soul that is found in the human would also be placed in an animal's body. The Maya thought that the same exact soul placed in them- as a human being- was also placed in an animal when they were born (Mayan Religion). The two souls would share the same fate- if the person was killed, the animal would die, and the opposite was true as well. This animal that shared a humans soul could be any kind of animal, any size, any species. Ordinary Mayans could not choose their animal, but they

believed that kings could choose. Usually, the kings would choose to share their soul and spirit with a jaguar. A Jaguar was an animal that was highly respected and loved animal by the Mayan people (Mayan Religion - Ancient Mayan Civilization). By entering into a trance, a skilled shaman could transform into his or her animal spirit--good shamans probably had several animal companion spirits--in order to enter the supernatural world. Sometimes shamans achieved transformations through the use of hallucinogenic drugs or fasting. Often, though, the transformations were done along with Maya blood ceremonies. Bloodletting- a Mayan form of sacrifice where you cut yourself and offer the blood as food to the Gods- was also believed to help people connect with their animal spirits (Mayan Religion). The Mayan people would perform the bloodletting it was believed that their blood nourished the Gods (Mayan Religion). As you can tell, the Mayans had a simple religion, with complex rituals. Their religion is seen in many other religions today, especially Catholicism. It is amazing that we know so much about Mayan religion considering the Spanish attempted to eliminate the Maya culture and religion, and they almost did. Some people think that the sacrifices and the bloodletting rituals are horrifying, but to the Mayan people, this was a normal part of their everyday worship. Mayan Religion was the key element in the development of the highly advanced Mayan Civilization.