



ANCIENT AMERICA

Religion

MAYAN - MESOAMERICA

Founder – Don't know at this time

Gods - The Maya believed in more than 160 gods. The primary Mayan gods were forces or objects in nature that affected people's daily lives. Many gods had animal characteristics. The jaguar was especially important to the Maya.

Place of Worship –temple/pyramids/shrines

Beliefs - The Maya believed that the gods had created the world and could influence or even destroy it. So, it was extremely important to honor the gods.

MAYAN - MESOAMERICA

Practices – The Maya honored their gods with offerings such as plants, food, flowers, feathers, jade, and shells. The Maya believed that blood gave the gods strength, so they also made blood offerings by sacrificing animals and, sometimes, humans. The people who were sacrificed were usually orphans, slaves, and nobles captured during war.

Other Facts - Human sacrifice played a role in an ancient Mayan game called pok-a-tok. Every Mayan city had at least one ball court where the game was played. People from all levels of Mayan society watched and placed bets on the outcome of the game. Slaves, land, and homes could be won and lost during a game. Surviving art from the ball courts shows members of the losing team being sacrificed and the captain of the defeated team being beheaded.

INCA - MESOAMERICA

Founder – Don't know at this time

Gods - The Incas believed in many gods who controlled various aspects of nature. The most important god was Inti, the sun god. Inti was important for two reasons. First, Incas believed that the emperor's family was descended from Inti. Second, Inti was also the god of agriculture, which was the basis of Inca life. The Incas also believed that spirits dwelled in certain sacred objects and places, called huacas: Huacas included temples, charms, and places in nature such as springs and rocks.

Place of Worship –temple/shrines

Beliefs - The Inca religion was highly formal and required a large number of priests to conduct rituals and ceremonies. Chosen women work in temples or shrine, studied Inca religion, learned how to prepare special food & drink for religious ceremonies, and wove garments for the Sapa Inca, and sometimes they were sacrificed at important religious ceremonies.

INCA - MESOAMERICA

Practices – The Incas offered sacrifices to the gods. In many rituals, the Incas sacrificed live animals, usually llamas or guinea pigs. The Incas also practiced human sacrifice, but only on the most sacred occasions or in times of a natural disaster. The priests practiced divination to try to predict the future. Divination helped the Incas decide what course of action to take.

Other Facts - The Incas believed in an afterlife, the tombs and bodies of the dead were also considered huacas. People often prayed and made offerings to all these huacas.

AZTEC - MESOAMERICA

Founder – Don't know at this time

Gods – The Aztecs adopted some of their gods from other Mesoamerican groups. But the Aztecs' own chief god was Huitzilopochtli, the god of the sun and of war. In fact, the Aztecs called themselves the “people of the sun.”

Place of Worship –temple/shrines

Beliefs - The Aztecs believed that humans needed the gods for survival. It was the gods who granted a good harvest or, if they were displeased, sent earthquakes and floods. So it was important to please the gods through elaborate rituals and ceremonies.

AZTEC - MESOAMERICA

Practices – Priests presented the gods with flowers, ears of maize, clothing, or images made of wood. Aztec rituals included some form of blood sacrifice. Every morning, Aztec priests sacrificed hundreds of birds to Huitzilopochtli. Priests also pierced their skin with cactus spikes to offer their own blood. They threw the sacrificial victims of the fire god into a great blaze. Cut the heart out of some victims since it represents life.

Other Facts - Overall, the Aztecs practiced human sacrifice on a much larger scale than other Mesoamerican groups.