

Evidence about Maya kings and their religious ceremonies



A carving from above a doorway in the Maya city of Yaxchilán in Mexico. It shows Shield Jaguar the Great (CE 681-742), and his wife, Lady K'ab'al Xook, taking part in a bloodletting ceremony. The king holds a flaming torch above his wife who is pulling a rope with stingray barbs on it through her tongue. The blood was caught in the bowl underneath and presented to the gods.

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Part of a carving from over a door from Yaxchilán in Mexico. King Bird Jaguar VI is being presented with his spear by one of his wives in preparation for a battle in CE 755.

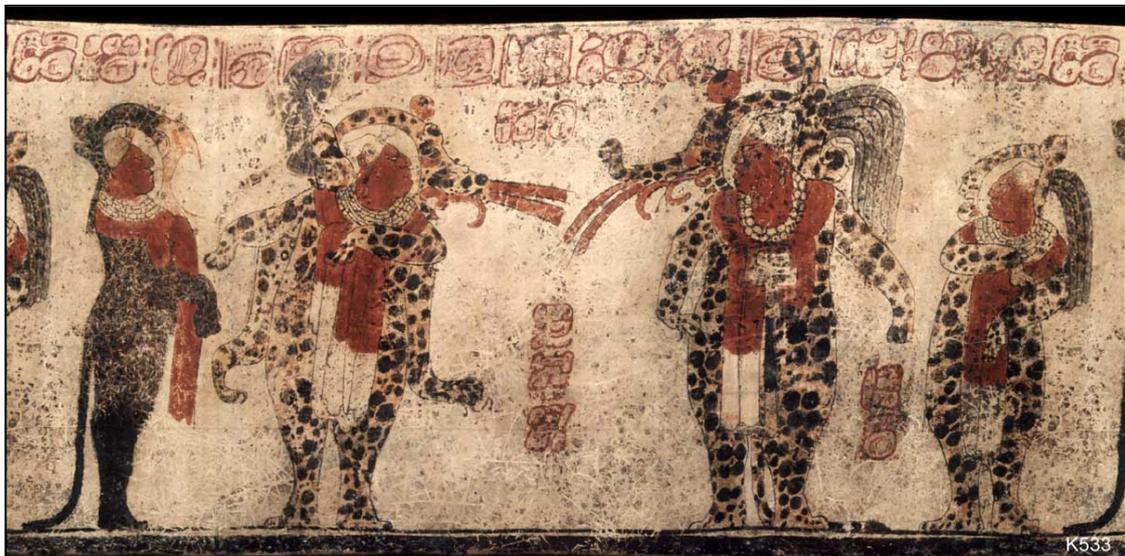


From a decorated vase. This shows a king in the middle coming back from a successful battle. A warrior holds the battle standard while an acrobat balances on a ladder.

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This is an image from a decorated pottery cup. A king, on the left, gives an offering to gods, on the right. The offering is kernels of maize.



This is an image from a decorated pottery cup. Two kings dress as one of the Hero Twins, Xbalaque, in jaguar skin and deer antlers.

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A decorated pottery vessel from Motul de San José, as it is now known. A king sits on a bench to the right while trumpeters announce the arrival of a visitor.



This is a standing stone called a stela. It shows a king dancing on the upper part. On the lower part a jaguar looks up at him in admiration. This comes from a site called la Amelia in the Petén forest and dates to CE 807.

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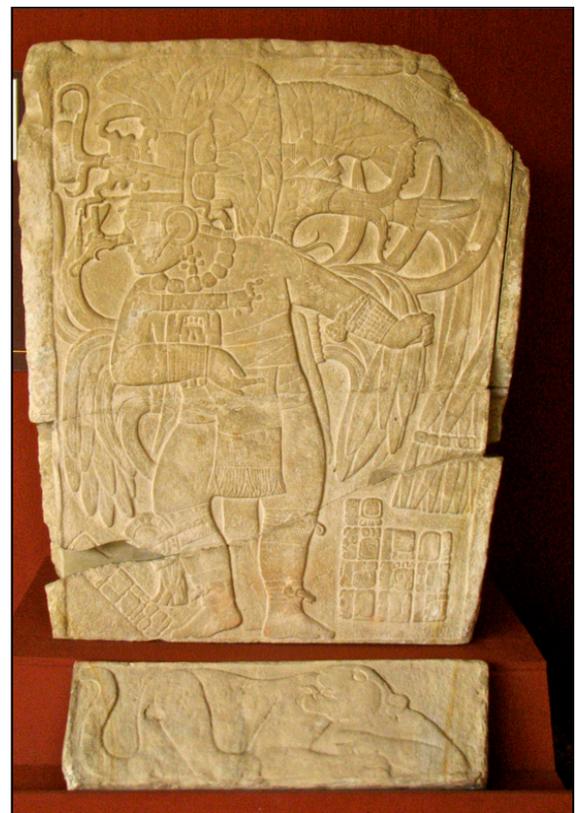
### How Maya kings tried to be like the gods

Maya kings wanted to control the people they ruled over. They also wanted people to do what they asked and bring them gifts. The best way the kings found to do this was to make the people believe that they were like the gods.

The king often dressed like one of the gods, usually the Maize God, with a headdress decorated with jade and feathers of the quetzal bird, which were both green like the leaves of the maize plant. He sat on the skin of a jaguar, just like one of the gods of the underworld. Sometimes the kings dressed up as other gods. In this painting from a pottery cup two kings are dressed as Xbalanque, one of the Hero Twins whose name means Jaguar Deer.



The king would also dance. In this standing stone the king is carved with one foot up and his hands to one side of him as if he is just about to move and carry on with the dance. The dances would re-enact parts of the stories and myths of the Maya, like the Popul Vuh, and would change the king into a god.



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Sometimes the kings had to spill some of their own blood as a sacrifice to the gods, though, and so did queens. This carving shows King Shield Jaguar and Lady Xok (pronounced shoke) in this kind of sacrifice. The queen is pulling a rope with stingray barbs on it through her tongue and the blood is dripping into the bowl lined with paper underneath her. The king is holding a huge flaming torch over her, suggesting that this sacrifice was done at night.



When the king went away to war and when he came back (if he won) there would also be ceremonies. In this carving, the queen is giving her husband, Bird Jaguar VI, a spear that he will take to war with him.

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### How to take good digital photos

Here are some simple tips for taking great photos.

- Get your partner to practise their pose first, and to decide and arrange any props they might want.
- Make sure you don't cut off their head (in the photo)!
- Look carefully at the picture you are about to take and line up the camera so you get all the detail in that you want.
- Try to get your partner/s in the centre or symmetrically arranged
- Once your partner is in position, take the photo quickly!

