The Ancient Maya

Precious Cacao

One of the many crops that the Maya farmed was the fragrant cacao bean. These beans grew on trees from the soils of el Salvador, Guatemala and Belize.
They were a precious crop, prized for their chocolatey flavour and used in drinks for the rich and noble. Unsweetened cacao is deeply bitter and the Maya would spice it up with some chillis, this is a drink still enjoyed today.

By the Sea

The Maya people living by the coast would source things such as fish, turtle shells and salt from the sea. The diet of the Maya was made up mostly of fruits, nuts and grains so salt was quite important for them since they hardly ate any meat. Salt was also used for trading.

Below: A carving showing a Maya bloodletting ritual

Turtle shells were collected for making into instruments that were played with antlers and conch shells were blown into and used as horns.

Spines from stingrays were also collected by Maya priests and rulers for bloodletting and piercing their tongues and body parts with. This was a way to win favour with the Maya gods. Even the common people did this.

Photo courtesy of City of Boston Archives (@bostonarchives) - granted under creative commons license - attribution

"Bird Jaguar" by chupa is licensed under CC BY 2.0

Mayan Fashion

The Maya grew cotton in the Yucata'n and other setlements. As a result, this was the choice of material for basic garments.The basic garment for the common peasant (far right) would be a a loincloth made from a long strip of cotton called an 'ex'. They would usually be barefoot.

Maya women wore cotton skirts or simple cotton dresses, called a 'huipil'. Both males and females would also cover their shoulders with a square of cotton or animal skin.

Dressing for Society

Around the Classic period of the Maya civilisation (200AD), social hierarchy became much more important and the rich and royal started to dress more and more elaborately. They would adorn themselves with items that peasants could never hope to afford, such as huge, fancy headdresses made with the feathers of macaws and quetzal birds. Quetzal feathers were highly precious.

Skins of ocelots, jaguars and other large predators were made into clothing and footwear for the elite. They also wore huge earplugs and facial ornaments made from bone, shell or jade. Body paint was also used for markings and they even filed their teeth into sharp points and put jade mosaics on the front of them!

Above: A quetzal bird

Left: Maya priest
Right: warrior

"Resplendent Quetzal" by tambauma76 is licensed under CC BY 2.0

Type here to search

20:14
03/06/2020