

Gods

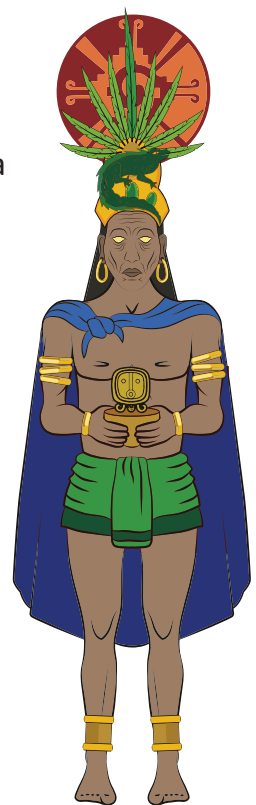
The Maya were great believers in religion and worshipped a pantheon of many gods. They believed that their gods could transform into human or animal shapes and often visited Earth to check up on the humans. Priests were revered and performed ceremonies to keep the gods happy, and to bring prosperity to the city. Part of the Maya belief system was that there were three parts to the world: Heaven, the Earth and Xibalba (the underworld). These three areas were all linked together by a giant World Tree. When they died, Maya kings believed that they would pass into the afterlife to become gods.

Itzamna

Itzamna was the ruler of the heavens and one of the most important gods in the Maya religion. He was the king of night and day. He ruled over these realms with a great knowledge rather than great strength—he is often shown as a toothless old man. He was the son of the god Hunab Ku, who created and tried to destroy the world. Many Maya believed that Itzamna and his wife Ix Chel created all of the other gods and set the Maya on their way to being a great civilisation.

Ix Chel

As well as being the wife of Itzamna, Ix Chel was an important goddess. She was often called Lady Rainbow—the Maya believed that she was responsible for the moon, the weather and children. Ix Chel took on different forms depending on what she was representing. She was sometimes shown as a young, beautiful woman. In this form, she looked after marriage and love. In her other form, Ix Chel was a haggard old woman who had the power to create and destroy the Earth.



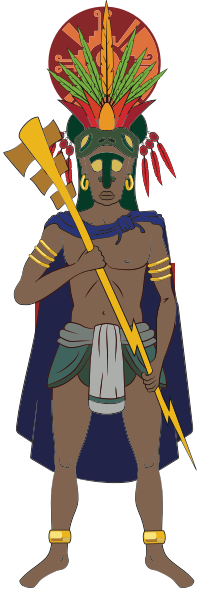
Kinich Ahau

As a sun god, Kinich Ahau was one of the most important Maya gods. The Maya believed that the sun god turned into a jaguar at night to stalk the rainforest.



Chac

Rain was vitally important to the Mayan way of life. Without it, crops wouldn't grow but, with too much, their cities would flood. Chac was the god of rain and storms and, not surprisingly, also the god of agriculture (growing crops). He was a very popular god, and most sacrifices would have included prayers to keep him happy. He controlled four other gods called Chacs, who were responsible for different parts of the weather.



RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. What did the Maya call their underworld?
2. Which god sometimes looked like a young, beautiful woman?
3. Who was Ix Chel's husband?
4. What was Kinich Ahau's main role?
5. What did Kinich Ahau turn into at night?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

V

What is a "pantheon of gods"?

V

Which word in the text tells you that priests were respected?

S

What was waiting for Maya kings who died according to their beliefs?

S

Why was Chac so important?

P

Why do you think the Maya had so many gods?