

MAYAN TRADE

The Mayas became great traders. The Mayan name for merchants was *ppolm*. These *ppolm* became highly respected and important members of Mayan society. They even had their own god, Ek Chaub.

Trade routes developed throughout the Mayan lands. Later, trade went as far south as Guatemala and Belize. Trade also extended to the Caribbean Islands.

Human caravans carried the trading goods. The Mayas did not use animals or wheeled vehicles to move goods. Instead, slaves did most of the carrying.

In the interior, small pathways criss-crossed the land. The Mayas did not build major road systems, but they did build canoes for river travel. The rivers provided a faster and more efficient way to move goods.

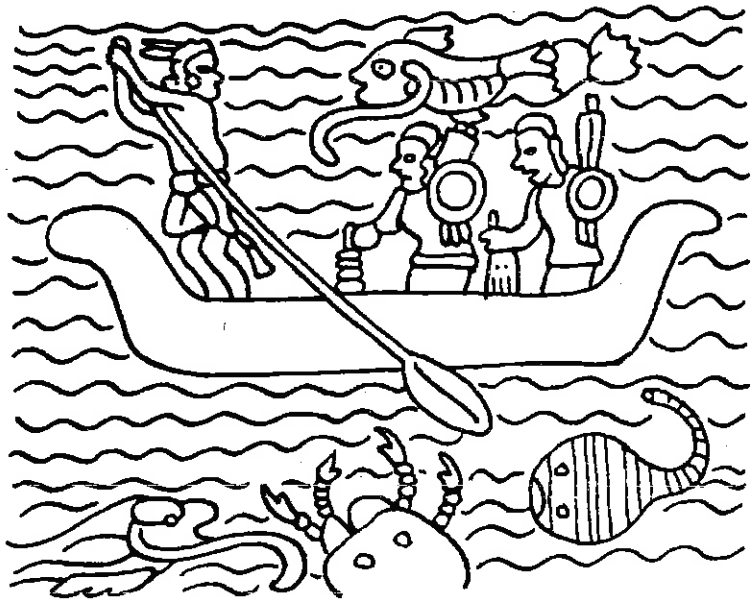
On the coastal regions, Mayas used large seagoing canoes. Christopher Columbus saw a Mayan canoe in 1502, during his fourth voyage to the Americas. He recorded that it was over 50 feet long and about eight feet wide and had a cabin structure and a crew of about 12 men.

Most of the Mayan trade was directly between merchants, who then resold goods. Some villages became major trading centers. The villagers built large stone warehouses in which goods were stored. Larger Mayan cities had great marketplaces. One of the most famous markets was in the Court of a Thousand Columns. This was a plaza next to the Temple of the Warriors in Chichén Itzá.

The Mayas used the barter system. Barter is the exchange of certain goods for others. Money is not used in this system. The Mayas did not have money. At times, they used cacao beans instead of money. One record shows that a slave was worth 100 cacao beans.

The Mayas traded fruits and vegetables as well as salt, honey, dried fish, turtle eggs, deer meat, and birds. They also exchanged many non-food items. Popular goods included cotton cloth, animal skins, feathers, shells, gold, emeralds, jade, and other valuable stones. The Mayas also bought and sold slaves at the markets.

No other ancient American group became as involved in trade as the Mayas. It was not until modern days that trade again became as important to our culture.



The Mayas used large seagoing canoes to carry on trade in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean.