**Document A: The Ancient Maya: Economy and Trade:** (Modified Excerpt)

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The Ancient Maya civilization had an advanced trade system consisting of short, medium and long trade routes and a robust market for a range of goods and materials.

**The Maya Economy:**

The Maya did not use "money" in the modern sense: there was no universally accepted form of currency which could be used anywhere in the Maya region. Even valuable items, such as cacao seeds, salt, [obsidian](http://archaeology.about.com/od/oterms/g/obsidian.htm) (volcanic glass) or gold tended to vary in value from one region or city-state to another, often rising in value the farther away these items were from their source. There were two kinds of goods commercialized by the Maya: prestige items and subsistence items. Prestige items were things like jade, gold, copper, highly decorated pottery, ritual items and any other less-practical item used as a status symbol by upper-class Maya. Subsistence items were those used on a daily basis: food, clothing, tools, basic pottery, salt, etc.

**Subsistence Items and Trade:**

Early Maya city-states tended to produce all of their own subsistence items. Basic agriculture - mostly production of corn, beans and squash - was the daily task of the majority of the Maya population. Basic items, such as pottery for cooking, were made in homes or in community workshops. Later on, as the Maya cities began to grow, they outstripped their food production and food trade increased. Other basic necessities, such as salt or stone tools, were produced in certain areas and then traded to places that lacked them. Some coastal communities were involved in the short-range trade of fish and other seafood.

**Prestige Items and Trade:**

The Maya had a bustling trade in prestige items as early as 1000 BCE. Different sites in the Maya region produced gold, jade, copper, obsidian and other raw materials: items made from these materials are found at nearly every major Maya site, indicating an extensive trade system.

**Sources:**

McKillop, Heather. [The Ancient Maya: New Perspectives.](http://erclk.about.com/?zi=6/3W5y) New York: Norton, 2004.

NY Times Online: [Ancient Yucatán Soils Point to Maya Market, and Market Economy](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/08/science/08maya.html?_r=1) 2008