

The Maya: What have historians learned about the Maya from what they left behind?

Timeline

Key concepts:

Settlements and Civilisations;
Progress and Change; Religion and Beliefs and Lifestyles.



People have lived in this region for over 12,000 years, and when they settled here first, they were hunter-gatherers. This means they migrated across the land, searching for food and places to settle. Over time, these people learned to farm and settled in small villages. Eventually, these grew into large city-states spread across what would one day become Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador and Honduras. These people were called the Maya, and their power and might reached their height in the 10th century.

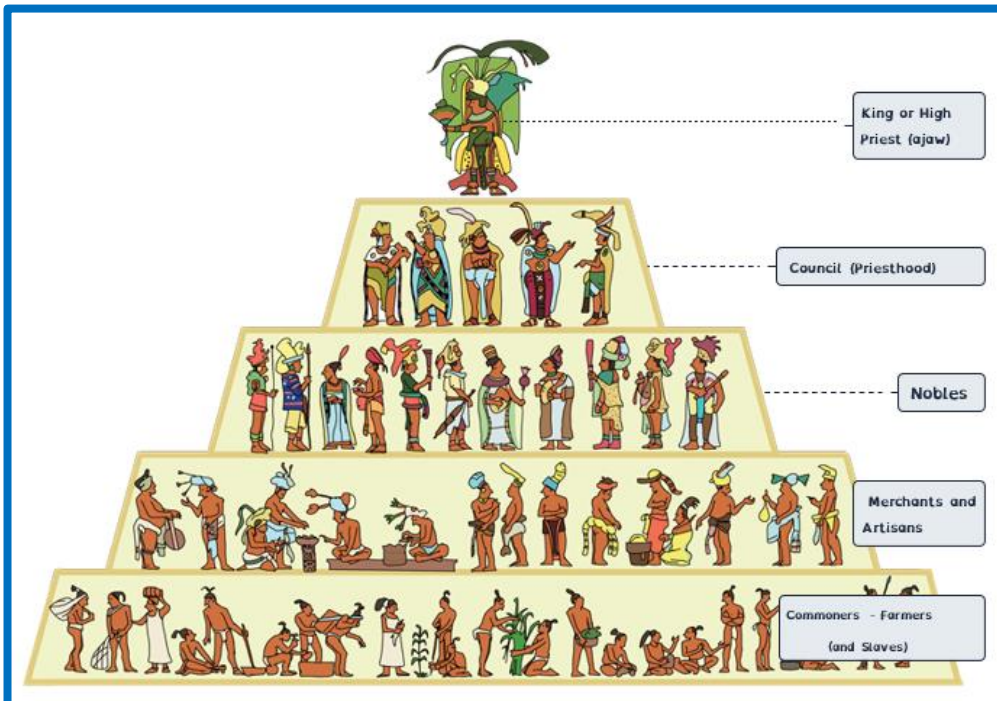


We know about the Maya because archaeologists have found evidence of their existence.

The Maya were famous for their wall art and beautiful writing. Many examples have been discovered over the years, and these two records give us an idea of what life was like for the different people in Maya society. There have also been many other archaeological discoveries of Maya tombs, funeral masks, architectural remains of the large city-states, and the famous stone pyramids that still stand today. There is one mystery that still puzzles archaeologists today. Something strange began to happen in the 10th century – the Maya people of the central Maya Lowlands began to abandon their cities. There is no real evidence to tell us why just multiple theories.



Maya	A group of people from Central America including Yucatan, Belize and northern Guatemala.
Settlement	A place where people establish a community.
Civilisation	A human society with its own social organization and culture.
Irrigate	To irrigate land means to supply it with water to help crops grow.
Slash and burn	Chop down any plants that had grown in 5 years and leave it on the land, before setting it alight to produce mineral rich ash that would provide the soil
Artefacts	A man-made object, such as pieces of art or tools, that is of particular cultural, historical or archaeological interest.
Religion	The belief in and worship of a power or powers, especially a God or gods.



Farming was important for the Maya people. It was one of the main reasons that the civilisation grew and became so powerful. They developed many specialist farming techniques to help grow crops and invented a way of collection and storing water to irrigate their crops.

