

Spotlight on the
MAYA, AZTEC, and INCA CIVILIZATIONS

Ancient **MAYA** **TECHNOLOGY**

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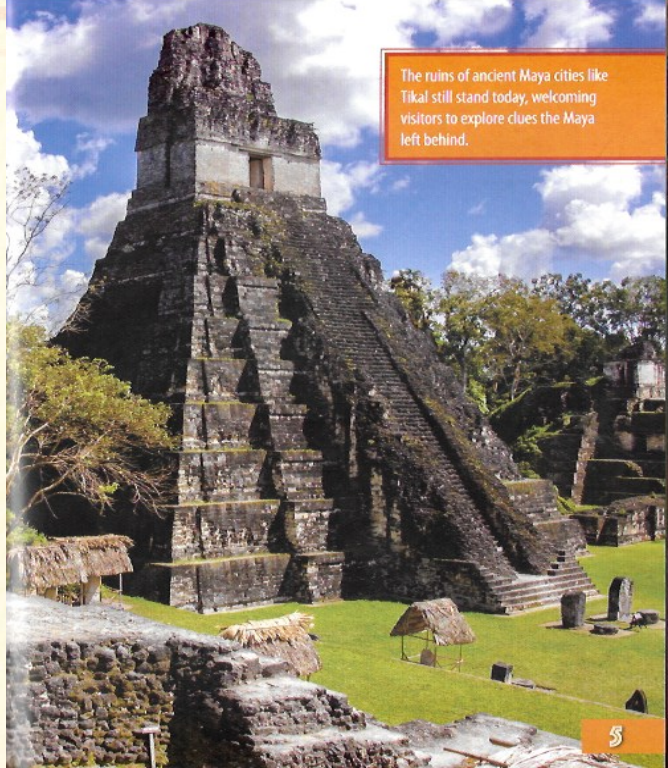
RISE OF THE MAYA

The lands of the ancient Maya stretch across parts of today's Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, and Honduras. Some areas are mountainous and covered in thick forests. Other lowland areas are swampy, with dense jungles along the coastline.

The Maya were great builders and are best known for their grand temples and palaces. They built **canals** to provide water to their people. They developed medicine and wrote books. They explored astronomy and invented advanced calendars based on their discoveries.

These advances in technology allowed the Maya culture to grow and prosper. Scattered populations of people grew into a strong civilization. Because of their advances, the Maya's small, simple villages eventually turned into great **city-states**. For hundreds of years, the Maya ruled over lands in today's Mexico and Central America, in what's known as Mesoamerica. This great culture and its advanced technology developed over thousands of years.

The ruins of ancient Maya cities like Tikal still stand today, welcoming visitors to explore clues the Maya left behind.



ADVANCES IN AGRICULTURE

The first people living in Maya lands were mostly hunter-gatherers, which means they hunted animals and gathered plants for food. However, by about 2000 BC, the Maya learned to grow maize, or corn. By growing maize and other crops, the Maya were able to settle small villages that led to a more permanent civilization.

The lowland coastal areas of the Maya region were difficult to farm due to large wetland areas and dense forests.

Maize was one of the most important ancient Maya crops. Today, Maya people still use maize in many of their meals.



This Maya canal is found in the ancient city of Palenque. Canals brought water to farmland and cities.

To manage the forest areas, the Maya used a slash-and-burn method of farming. They cleared large areas of forest by burning it. After the fire, the ashy soil would be rich for planting crops. The Maya also created a series of canals. These could be used to drain wetlands for use as farmland. These **techniques** were developed during a time called the Pre-Classic Period, during which the foundation of the Maya civilization was built.

USING ROCKS AND MINERALS

The lands of the Maya did not contain **iron ore**. Therefore, they couldn't make metal tools, unlike some other early civilizations. Instead, the Maya worked with hard minerals and rocks. Rocks, such as flint, were shaped into axes and other tools that could help clear forests and build houses.

Granite tools could be used to grind maize and prepare other foods. Obsidian, a strong volcanic glass, was sharpened and used for knives, spearheads, and other weapons. Even without strong metal, the Maya built massive temples, palaces, and roads.

The Maya also used their tools to make art and jewelry. The Maya collected jade, a beautiful green mineral that could be carved using flint tools. The Maya highly valued this precious stone, and some of the finest **artifacts** they left behind are carved from jade. Many Maya rulers have been found buried with jade jewelry and other pieces of jade art.

The Maya created jewelry and other art from jade, which is a valuable stone found in the highlands of Mesoamerica.

