

### Key words

**civilisation** - the society, culture and way of life of an area.

**sacrifice** - an act of slaughtering or surrendering an animal/person as an offering to a god.

**temple** - an ancient Mayan place of worship.

**Chichen Itza** - a site in northern Yucatán, Mexico; the centre of the Mayan empire after ad 918.

**headdress** - an ornamental covering or band for the head, especially one worn on ceremonial occasions.

**maize** - a Central American cereal plant with large grains set in rows on a cob, which was grown by the Mayans.

**hierarchy** - a system in which members of an organization or society are ranked according to relative status or authority.

**historical era** - a significant period of time marked by distinctive character or events.

**Palenque** - the site of a former Mayan city in south-eastern Mexico.

**Haab** - part of the Mayan calendar; lasting for 365 days.

**Tzolk'in** - part of the Mayan calendar; lasting for 260 days.

**hieroglyphs** - a stylized picture of an object, used in writing, representing a word, syllable, or sound.

**decline** - to become smaller, fewer or less important.

### Key facts

- Historical opinion is changing all the time often in light of new evidence. The latest technology has enabled archaeologists to discover up to 60,000 hidden Mayan buildings in present-day Guatemala. Unfortunately, they can't be dated. This means that the Mayan civilization may have been 3 or 4 times larger than previously thought.
- Mayan cities were NOT built on a grid system but incorporated large open spaces both within the townscape and outside.
- Although there is still some uncertainty about the nature of human sacrifice, it is now believed that this was not commonplace. Where it happened, it may have involved just prisoners-of-war.
- The Maya were highly regarded not just for their sophisticated system of writing using glyphs but also for their ability to farm a hostile terrain. Remember that they never grazed animals and grew mainly maize which, unlike wheat, they could cultivate alongside trees using terraces.
- The Mayan empire did not decline suddenly and everywhere but the decline was more transitional. In some areas, communities were deserted but in others the process of decline took several hundred years. Coastal towns continued to trade.
- Most historians, given the choice would have preferred to have lived in Mayan lands than in Saxon England at the time.

#### Timeline

