

TOP SECRET

**FILE: The Disappearance
of the Maya**

History Case File No. 029

November 2016

Dear Agent,

A new case has crossed my desk. Imagine: entire villages left behind. Cities left to decay. An entire society gone. The whisper of a people left on the wind. Where did the Maya go? What led to the fall of the Maya? How did this great civilization end? There are some 88 theories or variations of theories that attempt to explain why the Maya disappeared.

We have gone through and narrowed it down to a list of six suspects (theories). Search the evidence and crack this case!

History Files Director,

Mrs. Daily

Possible Suspects



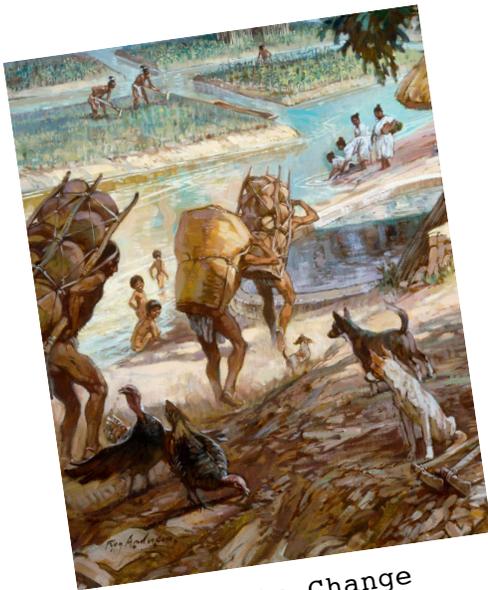
Invasion & Warfare



Collapse of Trade



Disease



Climate Change



Famine & Drought

Exhibit A

FOREIGN INVASION

Archaeological evidence in the Yucatan points to an infiltration of Toltec artifacts in Maya held territory. Could there have been an invasion of the Toltec? Some archaeologists hypothesize that Toltec invasions began in the 9th century and set off a 100-year chain reaction of decline. But can a military defeat explain the decline of an entire, powerful society? Plus, where did all the people go? Military invasion could account for a rise in deaths, but not the deaths of every last Mayan. Most experts think this was only a piece to a larger puzzle.

Exhibit B

In the same vain, other archaeologists have pointed to constant warfare between city-states. Large, successful city-states like Copan and Tikal were fighting each other on a regular basis. The idea of peaceful Maya had been disproven through archaeological evidence. Could this have contributed to the decline of the Maya?

WARFARE

Exhibit C

COLLAPSE OF TRADE

The Maya traded with more than just its own city-states. It also traded with other cultures of Mesoamerica. It was at one point hypothesized that a decline in trade with the Teotihuacan could have led to the collapse of the Maya, but new information about the end of the Teotihuacan civilization has led scientists to believe that trade was not a factor. It was first believed that the Teotihuacan collapsed around 600-650, which meant that other cultures had to restructure their trade and economies but failed. New information about the Teotihuacan has shown that they collapsed much earlier, meaning that other cultures of Mesoamerica were successful in restructuring trade and thrived for centuries after the fall of the Teotihuacan.

Exhibit D

Widespread disease could explain the rapid depopulation seen during the Maya collapse. Scientists know that parasites are common to rainforests, like where the Maya lived. Development of the civilization, such as land clearing for agriculture, could have disturbed the parasite habitat and introduced it into the Maya water or food supply. Scientists are not sure that this could have caused such a large civilization failure, or what might be more possible is it contributed to the downfall of the Maya.

DISEASE

Exhibit E

New research is suggesting that the Maya actually destroyed themselves. The large amounts of forest needed for slash-and-burn agriculture may be the culprit (what is responsible for the disappearance). Fields cleared only produced crops for a few years and needed to lay fallow (empty) for 15 years before being used again. This allowed nutrients to flow back into the soil. But what if the population grew too quickly? Fields would need to be used again at a quicker rate. Nutrients would not be able to get into the soil and crops could fail. With not enough crops, the population began to die out and entire cities had to be abandoned.

FAMINE

Exhibit F

Building off the idea of famine. What if famine was not the only outcome? Would large amounts of deforestation have any other impact? According to some scientists, it would. With a significant amount of trees cut down, the Maya homeland's climate would have changed. It would have become hotter and drier. This would have made the area more vulnerable (likely to be harmed) to drought. No water would have meant the Maya had to abandon their homes or die.

CLIMATE CHANGE & DROUGHT