

THE GREAT MAYAN MYSTERY

One of the great mysteries in the history of civilization is what happened to the Mayas. The Mayas suddenly abandoned their cities about A.D. 850. The Mayan society collapsed, and the people scattered through the countryside. Scholars have formed many theories about the cause of the collapse. However, not one bit of proof of any of these theories exists.

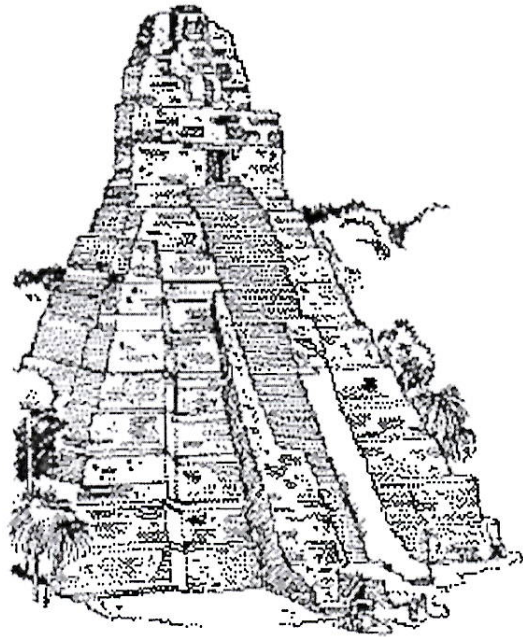
Some people believe that a natural disaster caused the Mayas to desert the cities. Perhaps an earthquake or a hurricane forced them to leave suddenly. Was an epidemic of a disease such as yellow fever the cause? Perhaps they had to leave so quickly that no one had time to carve stones that would tell the story.

Others believe that the Mayas left due to agricultural reasons. Perhaps the Mayan system of farming exhausted the soil. The crops could no longer feed the large population. The Mayas did not develop new planting methods. They always used the planting stick. They never discovered how to use a plow. This limited the size of the crops. The Mayas did not use animals nor wheeled vehicles. The only way to transport food from the fields to the cities was by manpower. This limited how far away from the city the Mayas could plant crops. If this theory is true, the people had to leave the cities to avoid hunger.

Another theory is that the peasants may have revolted against the rulers. The peasants worked very hard. Most of their labor provided food and wealth to the upper classes. Did the peasants refuse to continue their work? The upper classes would have had to leave the cities to survive if the peasants left the farms.

Still other people believe that invaders attacked and conquered the cities. Perhaps other tribes such as the Toltecs took over the cities and forced the Mayas to leave.

The mystery of the last days of the Mayas is still being debated. We have no proof of any one of the theories. Will scientists discover something in the Mayan ruins that will give us a clue to the answer? Will we ever find the answer to the great mystery of the Mayas?



Tikal, in northern Guatemala, was the largest Mayan city. It and the other Mayan cities were abandoned in about A.D. 850.