

How did climate change destroy the Roman empire?

Most likely in the past, the Romans, like us, once thought that they were capable of conquering and mastering nature. But, the most valuable lesson they received was this: They were wrong.

One of the stories that many historians around the world have been arguing for years, was the cause of the fall of the Roman empire - one of the most powerful empires in human history. In the 2nd century AD, this empire dominated a large area, from the north of the United Kingdom to the edge of the Sahara desert, from the Atlantic Ocean to Mesopotamia.

Five centuries later, marked the decline of the Roman empire. Trade slowed, cities were less developed, and scientific advances were no longer explosive as before. According to historian Ian Morris from Stanford University, the collapse of the Roman empire can be considered a setback in the history of human civilization.



Explaining the cause of this collapse, each historian has a different perspective. In 1984, according to researcher Alexander Demandt, there were more than 200 hypotheses about the fall of the Roman empire. Most of these hypotheses focus on political issues, as well as the catch-up in terms of production technology and the military power of neighboring countries.

However, recently there has been much evidence that climate change also contributed to the collapse of the Roman empire. It is the paradoxes of social development, combined with the irregularities of nature and climate, that put an end to the existence of the Roman empire. Climate change is not actually a product of industrialization, but has been going on for a very, very long time, throughout its history. Just over-controlled industrialization has pushed climate change so much faster than before.

According to many historians, the climate played an important role for both the growth and collapse of the Roman empire. More specifically, this empire developed at a time when the climate was most favorable for the agricultural economy: wet, warm, and stable. It was the agricultural development that brought about economic development, from which helped Rome become more and more powerful. And the favorable conditions of nature became the foundation on which Rome built its empire.



Therefore, when the climate became unstable and unpredictable, the Roman empire weakened accordingly. In the 6th century, when the climate became unpredictable, it was also the time when the Roman Empire was looked at by other powerful enemies. Especially during the years 530 - 540, the number of active volcanoes increased sharply, marking the beginning of a cold period lasting 150 years. This is also the time when the plague broke out for the first time in human history.

In this period, the average life expectancy of the Romans was only about 20-30 years old, and the main cause of death in this period was the infectious disease. Along with that, the development of roads has made the disease more and more spread. The plague and the harshness of the climate almost pushed the Roman empire to a time of perdition, which claimed the lives of more than half of the Roman population.

The plague took place under the reign of Justinianus the Great, and is still one of the most expensive lessons on the complex relationship between man and nature. The culprit of the pandemic was the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*, which was not an ancient disease, but only began to appear around 2000 BC. According to chromosome studies, the strain that caused the Justinian pandemic (named after the Emperor Justinianus) originated in western China, and followed the silk route to the Romans. Here, they grow and spread thanks to their hosts, rodents - which proliferate rapidly in the countries where agriculture develops.

Our modern world is now very different from the ancient Roman empire. We have hospitals, epidemic researchers, and antibiotics. We have the ability to control diseases, as well as the ability to research and find ways to cure them. However, nature is still something beyond our control, and this forces us to be always prepared to take precautions, as well as try to limit the speed of climate change. Most likely in the past, the Romans, like us, once thought that they were capable of conquering and mastering nature. But, the most valuable

lesson they received was this: They were wrong. And the price paid for that lesson, is the collapse of one of the most powerful empires in human history.

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