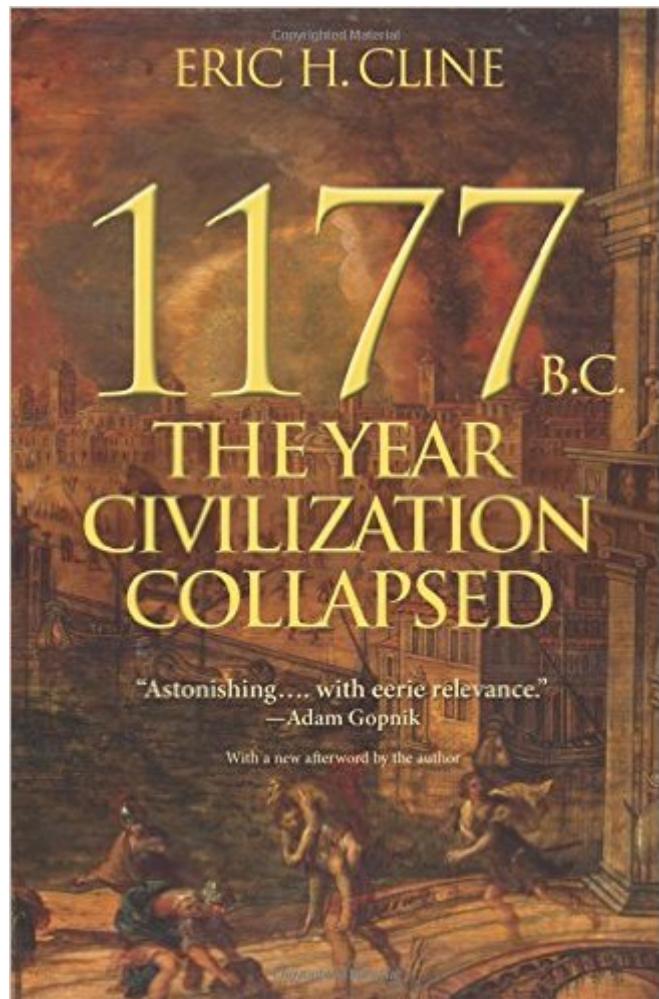


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1177 B.C.: The Year Civilization Collapsed (Turning Points In Ancient History)



Synopsis

In 1177 B.C., marauding groups known only as the "Sea Peoples" invaded Egypt. The pharaoh's army and navy managed to defeat them, but the victory so weakened Egypt that it soon slid into decline, as did most of the surrounding civilizations. After centuries of brilliance, the civilized world of the Bronze Age came to an abrupt and cataclysmic end. Kingdoms fell like dominoes over the course of just a few decades. No more Minoans or Mycenaeans. No more Trojans, Hittites, or Babylonians. The thriving economy and cultures of the late second millennium B.C., which had stretched from Greece to Egypt and Mesopotamia, suddenly ceased to exist, along with writing systems, technology, and monumental architecture. But the Sea Peoples alone could not have caused such widespread breakdown. How did it happen? In this major new account of the causes of this "First Dark Ages," Eric Cline tells the gripping story of how the end was brought about by multiple interconnected failures, ranging from invasion and revolt to earthquakes, drought, and the cutting of international trade routes. Bringing to life the vibrant multicultural world of these great civilizations, he draws a sweeping panorama of the empires and globalized peoples of the Late Bronze Age and shows that it was their very interdependence that hastened their dramatic collapse and ushered in a dark age that lasted centuries. A compelling combination of narrative and the latest scholarship, 1177 B.C. sheds new light on the complex ties that gave rise to, and ultimately destroyed, the flourishing civilizations of the Late Bronze Age--and that set the stage for the emergence of classical Greece.

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Customer Reviews

[I have edited this review to correct some flaws pointed out in comments.]The other reviewers have already pointed out the book's many fine points; I agree with them that this is a book well worth reading. I had long thought that the Late Bronze Age Collapse was primarily due to the depredations of the Sea Peoples, and this book scotches that idea. Yes, the Sea Peoples played a part in it, but they may well have been just as much Effect as Cause. That is, their rampage may well have been induced by the same factors that brought down other cities. The real contribution of this book lies in the application of recent archaeological findings to the problem. Over the last few decades archaeologists have built up a steady compilation of data on the cities of the Late Bronze Age, and they have demonstrated that not all those cities were destroyed in wars. Some show evidence of having been wrecked by earthquakes; in others, the destruction is confined to the central palace and government facilities, suggesting that a popular revolt, not a foreign invasion, lay behind the destruction. Other sites, however, do show the kind of general destruction we'd expect from a victorious enemy. Especially important is the evidence they bring to bear showing that some sort of regional climate change was responsible for the at least some part of the collapse. The evidence indicates a cooler, dryer climate which would have been devastating to the cereal crops on which civilizations are dependent. The cooler climate would have led to repeated famines that would have led to revolts, migrations, and wars - all of which appear in the record of this period. However, there are two points on which I disagree with the author. The first is the author's decision not to organize the causal factors into some sort of logical pattern. Instead, he declares that all of the factors (climate change, poor harvests, migration, civil disturbance, and war) converged to create a "perfect storm" that destroyed Late Bronze Age civilization in the Near East. That struck me as overly conservative. My second objection falls on the assumption that a collapse of international trade caused by the piratical depredations of the Sea Peoples added to the collapse. The author several times refers to an 'international system' of trade, likening it to modern globalization. He even goes so far as to suggest that the societies of that time had developed such intricate trade relationships that the disruption of those relationships helped undermine the societies. The problem arises when you think in terms of economic output. In all early societies, agricultural output constituted the vast majority of economic output. Sure, the historical records teem with stories of gems, spices, precious woods, and metals, but they attracted so much attention only because they were so rare. In terms of economic output, grain was far and away the most important component of all ancient societies. Indeed, in 1790, 90% of all laborers in the USA worked on farms. So let's keep our eyes on the ball here: grain. Trade in grain was rare and limited to emergency situations, because the transport

systems of the Late Bronze Age were incapable of moving grain in bulk. The ocean-going ships of the day had cargo capacities of a few tens of tons. Grain was carried in heavy ceramic jars; a single ship could carry enough food to provide for at most a hundred people for a year. Land transportation was even worse: the inefficient wagons and poor roads of the day did not permit the carriage of large amounts of grain very far. After a few tens of miles, so much of the grain would have to go to feed the dray animals that there just wouldn't be much left at the destination. Thus, the disruption of trade would have denied rulers their luxuries, but would not have made much of a dent on the economy as a whole. A postscript to this review: the author of the book, Eric Cline, has graciously responded to my criticisms and finally gotten through my thick head a point that, while not mentioned in this review, came up in the exchange of comments. He has taken a lot of his time to straighten me out, and I deeply appreciate his patience with my errors.

This is a subject that ought to fill the reader with the feeling of "gosh-wow!" about how close to our own world and yet so very different was the world of the Late Bronze Age. The Bronze Age was Civilization 1.0 - the first draft of civilization. It was successful and flourishing and in many ways very much like our own. Then - suddenly - the slate was wiped virtually clean, and a new civilization - Civilization 2.0 - which would lead to our own - entered the stage of world history. Eric Cline in 1177 B.C. does a great job of setting the stage for the reader to appreciate and understand the destruction of Late Bronze Age civilization. The book is fairly slim, and a pretty quick read. Cline takes the reader back a few centuries from the mysterious 12th Century BC destruction of the Bronze Age world. Cline introduced the reader to Bronze Age civilization at its height, when commerce was globalized and a network of royal marriage alliances tied together empires and kingdoms from Egypt to the Hittite empire to Mycenae. Cline tells his story by referring to the many pieces of royal correspondence that archeologists have managed to uncover in the ruined cities of forgotten empires. It is a "gosh-wow" fact that we are able to read the correspondence between royalty more than 3,000 years after the fact. And yet there is so much we don't know. One of those things is "what happened?" In the space of virtually no time, the mighty Hittite empire was destroyed, leaving nothing but a bare memory in some biblical references. Mycenae was likewise completely destroyed, as were other empires and kingdoms of the epoch, e.g., Babylonia, Minoa, the Ugarit Kingdom, and Assyria, many of which disappeared so completely that they did not leave a memory behind, until their massive constructions were unearthed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Similarly, the Canaanite civilization disappeared to be recovered under the new management of the Hebrews and Philistines. Egypt survived in a much reduced form after fighting off the onslaughts of

Sea Peoples, but in weaker and much reduced form. The mode of destruction of Civilization 1.0 seems to have varied from region to region. Some cities seem to have suffered from earthquakes and to not have been repaired. The Hittite and Canaanite cities seem to have been destroyed by fire and/or war, or they were abandoned before the end. Cline rejects the notion of an invasion by the enigmatic Sea Peoples as the complete answer to the destruction of the Late Bronze Age world. It's not clear that there was such an invasion. The Egyptians describe the Sea Peoples - who attacked in 1207 and 1177 (from which Cline gets his ultimate year of "1177 B.C.") On the other hand, there is a panicky letter from Ugarit about some unknown ships threatening Ugarit, but the letter doesn't say who the ships were. Perhaps they were a rebel group from his own country; perhaps they were from Cyprus; perhaps they were the Sea People. We just don't know. Cline argues for a "system failure" in which a "perfect storm" of events - earthquake, economic decline, invasion, the loss of a major component of the world system - caused the entire system to go into decline. Cline does a good job of canvassing the various culprits for the LBA ("Late Bronze Age") collapse and makes effective arguments for why single factor explanations are not persuasive. The book is chock-a-block full of interesting "gosh-wow!" observations. For example, Cline repeatedly references the point that Troy was on the frontier between Mycenae and the Hittite Empire, and, so, the Trojan War may have been a brush fire war, akin to Vietnam, between the great powers of Mycenae and the Hittite Empire. Another "gosh-wow!" point that I've filed away is that the coalition of rebellious western kingdoms - to the west of Hatti in Asia Minor - was the "Assuwa," from which we get the word for "Asia," which has progressively been extended ever-eastward. Another bit of "gosh-wow!" is Cline's mention that by 1177 BC, the pyramids were already 1,000 years old. If that doesn't give the reader a feeling for the deep time of history, nothing will. Still another one was Cline's observation that the dissemination of the classic stories of the Ancient Near East might have been through sailors swapping stories in bars as they waited for the "toffs" to finish the diplomatic niceties on state visits://Such transfers of ideas undoubtedly took place not only at the upper levels of society, but also at the inns and bars of the ports and cities along the trade routes in Greece, Egypt, and the Eastern Mediterranean. Where else would a sailor or crew member while away the time waiting for the wind to shift to the proper quarter or for a diplomatic mission to conclude its sensitive negotiations, swapping myths, legends, and tall tales? Such events may perhaps have contributed to cultural influences spreading between Egypt and the rest of the Near East, and even across the Aegean. Such an exchange between cultures could possibly explain the similarities between the Epic of Gilgamesh and Homer's later Iliad and Odyssey, and between the Hittite Myth of Kumarbi and Hesiod's later Theogony. //Cline, Eric H. (2014-03-23). 1177 B.C.: The Year Civilization

Collapsed (Turning Points in Ancient History) (p. 59). Princeton University Press. Kindle Edition. This book didn't answer all my questions about the LBA. Honestly, what it did was inflame my interest in the subject just that much more, and make me want to visit the sites he mentions, but that's the subject of a different story.

There are so many theories concerning the end of the Bronze Age that a description and discussion of the theories was really needed. This book presents a coherent and highly readable outline of the period, setting it into its historical milieu.. Dr. Cline proposes some interesting parallels between 1177BC and the present which should give us all pause. I read this book all in one sitting, even at dinner. I could not put it down.

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