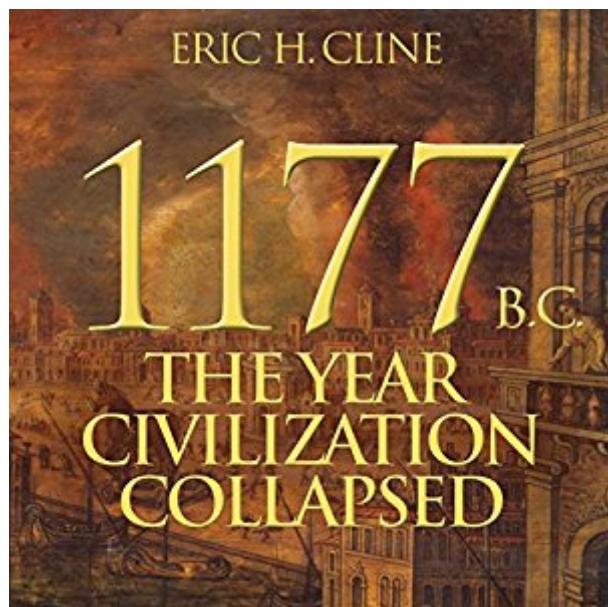


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1177 B.C.: The Year Civilization Collapsed



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.

Book Information

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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.

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 my 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.

I have been interested in this topic since 1966, when I wrote a paper on Minoan-Mycenaean trade patterns with the Fertile Crescent and Central Europe. In that I argued that this region was the nexus of a wide-ranging trade network; in the author's words "a cosmopolitan and globalized world system". The thesis of this splendid book is how the disruption of this trading system brought about the collapse of Later Bronze Age Civilization's "globalized world"; resulting in the destruction of the great civilizations of the LBA and the introduction of a "Dark Age". Eric H Cline, the author of the excellent Battle of Armageddon The Battles of Armageddon: Megiddo and the Jezreel Valley from the Bronze Age to the Nuclear Age and the useful Biblical Archaeology: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions) discusses the crucial role of the strategic resource of this period; tin. The disruption of the tin supply coming from distant mines in Afghanistan had catastrophic effects for the civilizations of the Hittites, Mitanni, Assyria and Egypt. (Personally, I think that sources of tin from Central Europe or perhaps even Britain would have been available by this time.) The author argues that this would be comparable to the disruption of the oil trade in today's "globalized world".

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