



# KLEOS

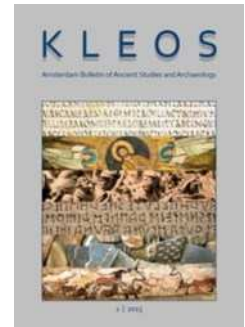
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## CONTACT

[kleosbulletin2.o@gmail.com](mailto:kleosbulletin2.o@gmail.com)

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## KLEOS – AMSTERDAM BULLETIN OF ANCIENT STUDIES AND ARCHAEOLOGY

*Kleos – Amsterdam Bulletin of Ancient Studies and Archaeology* is a peer-reviewed, open access (post)graduate journal that publishes original research papers in the fields of ancient history, classics and archaeology. *Kleos* also provides reviews of recent books, conferences and exhibitions. Published under the auspices of the Amsterdam Centre for Ancient Studies and Archaeology (ACASA), it primarily aims at offering (post)graduate students in the above-mentioned fields the opportunity to share their research, gain experience in publishing, and improve their scientific skills. *Kleos* is issued online.

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Eric H. Cline (ed.), 2014: *1177 B.C. The year civilization collapsed*, Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press (Turning points in ancient history).

ISBN 978-0-691-14089-6 (hardcover). 237 pp. € 29,95

Scholars and students of antiquity may already have encountered the dramatic ▶trailer of Eric Cline's new book on the internet. The same painting features on the glossy cover of the book itself. *1177 B.C. The year civilization collapsed* is the first volume in a new series of Princeton University Press: 'Turning points in history'.

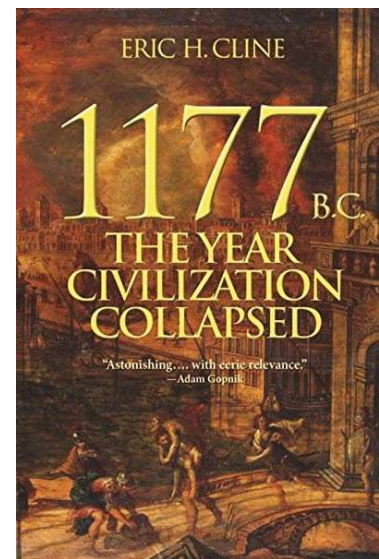
#### SUMMARY

*1177 B.C.* pursues several goals at the same time: Cline argues that the destructions at the end of the Late Bronze Age (LBA) in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean are worthy of the title 'turning point in history' (preface and prologue). He immerses the reader in the interconnected Mediterranean of the 15th-13th centuries B.C., aiming to show that this was a globalized network of societies similar to our modern world (chapter 1-3).

He presents the most recent understandings of the destruction sites, going over the archaeological and textual material known from Northern and Southern Syria, the Philistine *pentapolis*, Mesopotamia, Anatolia, the Greek Mainland, Cyprus and Egypt (chapter 4) and he investigates the possible causes for destruction at the end of this era (chapter 5), including earthquakes, climate changes, famine, internal rebellion, (Dorian) invaders, collapse of international trade, decentralization, rise of the private merchant and the Sea Peoples. For each of these causes, Cline argues that that cause alone cannot have been enough to bring down all of the involved civilizations. Thus, he proposes to follow the concept of 'Systems Collapse', which sees a 'multiplier effect' in the occurrence of the different destruction causes mentioned above.

#### STRUCTURE

Although the chronologically ordered chapters on the development of the Mediterranean network (1-3) cover a vast number of societies and events and are based on an enormous amount of textual and archaeological evidence, they read almost like a historical novel. Fernand Braudel could not have wished for a more capable author to carry out his suggestion of describing the major events and personae of this era in dramatic form (p. xvii). One flaw in the otherwise excellent structure of the book is the



emphasis on the Sea Peoples in the first half of the book. These peoples are only explicitly mentioned in the Egyptian inscriptions, where they are said to have raided Egypt for a second time in the year 1177 B.C. However, the Sea Peoples are not the only cause proposed for the destructions at the LBA, and other theories, pointing for instance to natural or economic causes for the destructions, have been in vogue for some decades.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, Cline takes the Sea Peoples as a general point of reference, both in choosing his title, and in discussing destructions and abandonments of a number of sites in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean. Other possible causes of destructions are systematically explored in chapter 5. This hold-off could possibly lead to confusion about the current state of the debate among laymen.

### STYLE

Cline is able to draw from an immense wealth of information and to present the evidence in an engaging and accessible way. *1177 B.C.* is written like a script of a BBC documentary (which will, hopefully, follow the publication in due time), in the way it captivates readers, explains difficult issues and sketches the general history of the rise and fall of the interconnected Mediterranean in the LBA.

The book is littered with amusing references and anecdotes (including Hercule Poirot, Lawrence of Arabia, a Hittite law against nose biting and the ice house of the king of Mari). Possibly difficult concepts such as cuneiform and faience are explained, as well as Akkadian as a *lingua franca* and Tudhaliya I/II's name. (The term 'Canaanite', which is used throughout the book, could have been defined more clearly.) For scholars familiar with the LBA, Cline's explanations are no doubt obvious, but for undergraduate students in archaeology, history or Ancient Near Eastern studies, the book is a pleasant starting-point for a deeper engagement with the period.

Also helpful for novices are a map of LBA societies and a list of 'dramatis personae' (p. vi-vii, 177-80). The map however does not include all the 'major players' listed by Cline and could have included more of recent scholarship on the Anatolian West Coast (Arzawa countries, presence of Ahhiyawans). The absence of Luwians as 'players' in the LBA is remarkable, as they may have played an important part in the interconnectivity of the period.<sup>2</sup>

The comparisons between events and developments in the ancient and modern world (such as the Arab spring and the importance of oil) are insightful and make the content more accessible.

The description of the 'bloom' of the interconnected LBA civilizations is definitely one of the strongest features of *1177 B.C.* It is in this account that Cline's knowledge and evident passion for the period shines through the prose. Cline is able to conjure the (imagined) atmosphere of this period, for instance in describing merchants contributing to cultural exchanges:

*Such transfer 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? (p. 59)*

#### AUDIENCE

Cline should be applauded for his successful attempt to engage a more general audience without losing sight of the complexity of the period and problem at hand. Despite Cline's explanations, the complex world of the LBA could still be a bit overwhelming for a layman. Though perhaps unsuitable as a textbook, *1177 B.C.* is greatly recommended to students starting in ancient history, archaeology or languages, who are interested in the earlier stages of Mediterranean antiquity, as well as scholars specialized in later periods who would like to know more about the early Mediterranean. Those interested in history in general, who are not easily scared off by a multitude of names and periods, will find *1177 B.C.* a very rewarding read.

#### FURTHER REMARKS

A few passages in the book show how difficult it can be to maintain the precarious balance between storytelling and scholarship. In the preface and prologue especially, Cline emphasizes the abrupt and cataclysmic end of the Bronze Age societies, while recent scholarship tends to stress gradual decline and abandonment. Cline's emphasis is probably needed to valorise the treatment of this period as the first of the 'Turning Points in history' series, but it is difficult to align with the conclusions of the book, where it is stressed that the disruptions were not caused by one entity or event.

Although the author does explain why the year 1177 B.C. specifically is chosen as a 'convenient point' of the end of an era (p. 172), it is debatable if this year really is 'the most representative of the entire collapse' and one might wonder why the more conventional dating, 1200 B.C., has been abandoned in favour of *1177 B.C.*, when neither represents 'the' collapse as a whole.

Cline provides the audience with a nuanced exposé of the destruction sites and causes, including recently gained insights (e.g. new evidence for violent destructions at Tell Tweini<sup>3</sup> and climate changes at the Bronze-Iron transition:<sup>4</sup> p. 113, 145-7). Oliver Dickinson's<sup>5</sup> argument, that destructions at many Mycenaean centres could have resulted from 'a prolonged period of major internal unrest, which could have involved both warfare between Mycenaean states and internecine strife within them',<sup>6</sup> is not part of Cline's inventory of calamities. Cline includes 'internal rebellion' as a destruction factor, but disregards possible competition between Mycenaean polities. Dickinson's criticism on the idea of overcentralization too,<sup>7</sup> is absent from *1177 B.C.*

References to Homer (to explain the Hittite-Egyptian war incited by the death of the Hittite prince Zannanza) and the presence of wooden writing boards on the Uluburun shipwreck (p. 70, 78) may be attractive to a general audience, but since the usability of the Homeric epics for LBA studies is still

under debate, a more elaborate explanation may be necessary to use those reference for the discussion about the end of the LBA.<sup>8</sup>

### NETWORKS

In the last part of *1177 B.C.*, Cline introduces complexity theory to nuance 'systems collapse' as the overarching cause for the destructions at the end of the LBA (p. 166-170). Cline argues that the interdependency of the LBA societies was 'open to instability the minute there was a change in one of the integral parts' (p. 168). The metaphors describing the LBA world as a complex system (power grids, traffic jams) are insightful for the general reader.<sup>9</sup>

A more explicit use of Network Theory, which emphasizes the vulnerability of complex networks, would have explained exactly why 'such a globalized international, vibrant, intersocietal network as was present during the Late Bronze Age' could not recover from the systems collapse. *1177 B.C.* contains network theoretical figures (p. 61, 107), but these are not referred to nor is their theoretical background explained. These are only methodological minutiae, as Cline argues convincingly that the collapse of the LBA was 'messy' and that 'a multitude of factors were present at the end of the LBA that could have helped destabilize, and ultimately led to the collapse of the international system (...) (p. 170).

### CONCLUSION

*1177 B.C. The year civilization collapsed* is a marvellous account of the Mediterranean societies of the Late Bronze Age and the eventual demise of their interconnected world. Cline's delightful storytelling and his nuanced exposé on the destructions and their causes make this book a must-read for both history lovers in general and for those already acquainted with the Late Bronze Age.

THALIA LYSEN

### NOTES

- 1 For criticism on the role of the Sea Peoples see J.T. Hooker, 1976: *Mycenaean Greece*, London, 156-60, and several entries in W.A. Ward/M.S. Joukowsky, 1992: *The crisis years. The 12th century B.C. from beyond the Danube to the Tigris*, Dubuque. For other destruction theories, see for instance P.P. Betancourt, 1976: The end of the Greek Bronze Age, *Antiquity* 50, 40-7; J.T. Hooker, 1982: The end of Pylos and the Linear B evidence, *Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici* 23, 209-17; K. Kilian, 1988: Mycenaean up to date, trends and changes in recent research, in: E.B. French / K.A. Wardle (eds.), *Problems in Greek Prehistory*. Manchester, 115-52; E.S. Sherratt, 2001: Potemkin palaces and route-based economies, in: S. Voutsaki / J.T. Killen (eds.), *Economy and Politics in the Mycenaean palace states*, Cambridge, ch. XIV.
- 2 See for instance the entries by A.M. Greaves, A.T. Millington and A. Teffeteller in Mouton/Rutherford / Yakubovitch, 2013: *Luwian identities:*

culture, language and religion between Anatolia and the Aegean, Boston, and the introduction (as well as other entries) of B.J. Collins, M. Bachvarova and I. Rutherford (eds.), *Anatolian Interfaces: Hittites, Greeks and their Neighbours: Proceedings of an International Conference on Cross-Cultural Interaction* (September 17-19, 2004, Emory University, Atlanta, GA), Oxford.

- 3 D. Kaniewski et al., 2011: The Sea Peoples, from Cuneiform Tablets to Carbon Dating. *Public Library of Science One* 6/6, e20232.
- 4 D. Kaniewski e.a., 2013: Environmental Roots of the Late Bronze Age Crisis. *Public Library of Science One* 8/8, e71004.
- 5 O. Dickinson, 2006: *The Aegean from Bronze Age to Iron Age. Continuity and change between the twelfth and eighth centuries B.C.*, London/New York, 50, 54-5.
- 6 Ibid. 54.
- 7 Dickinson op. cit., 35-8, 55.
- 8 For a recent discussion on the writing boards see W.Waal, 2011: They wrote on wood. The case for a hieroglyphic scribal tradition on wooden writing boards in Hittite Anatolia. *Anatolian Studies* 61, 21-34.
- 9 See for instance B. Routledge / K. McGeough, 2009: 'Just what collapsed? A network perspective on 'palatial' and 'private' trade at Ugarit', in: C. Bachhuber/R.G. Roberts (eds.), *Forces of transformation. The end of the Bronze Age in the Mediterranean*, Oxford, 22-29; I. Malkin, 2011, *A Small Greek World. Networks in the Ancient Mediterranean*, Oxford. For a general and accessible introduction into Network Theory and the vulnerability of complex networks, see A.L. Barabási, 2003: *Linked*. New York, esp. 109-122.