
This book examines in detail the events surrounding the transition from Bronze Age to Early Iron Age societies in the eastern Mediterranean. For Drews this was “one of history's most frightful turning points”; in his view, “for those who experienced it, it was a calamity” (p. 3). The aim of this book is to explain the widespread destruction of cities ca. 1200 B.C. (“the Catastrophe”). The scale of the problem is this: “Within a period of forty or fifty years at the end of the thirteenth and beginning of the twelfth century almost every significant city or palace in the eastern Mediterranean world was destroyed, many of them never to be occupied again” (p. 4).

In order to gain an eastern Mediterranean perspective on the Catastrophe, a chronological scheme is presented (Ch. 1: “The Catastrophe and its Chronology”). In particular a “low” chronology for Egypt is followed, i.e., Ramesses the Great ruled from 1279 to 1212 (rather than 1304 or 1290) (p. 5). This allows events in Egypt to be linked to the destruction of cities in the Near East. The Catastrophe is then surveyed (Ch. 2) by looking at the evidence from Anatolia, Cyprus, Syria, the Southern Levant, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, the Aegean Islands, and finally Crete.

Chapters 3 to 8 form Part 2 (“Alternative Explanations of the Catastrophe”) and discuss the ways that the Catastrophe has been explained since it was first recognized. Earthquakes (Ch. 3) provide the first explanation, “an ‘act of God’ of proportions unparalleled in all of history” (p. 33). Ugarit's enmity with Egypt (attested by a tablet from the Rap'anu Archive) was taken to mean that it was on good terms with “the Sea Peoples”, and therefore a natural explanation for the destruction had to be found (p. 34). Similar theories have been suggested for Knossos, Troy VIIh, Mycenae and Tiryns (pp. 35-36). Drews points out that few cities in antiquity are known for certain to have been destroyed by an “act of God” (p. 38). Indeed, Egyptian records show that the raiders who attacked Egypt in 1179 had previously sacked cities. Drews notes that the widespread burning of cities (in days before gas and electricity could assist with the total devastation), the relative absence of skeletons or items of value buried in the debris (rather than being secreted away in holes and pits), and the unscathed masonry at sites in the Argolid point away from natural causes and towards human intervention.

The evidence for Migrations (Ch. 4) is based in part on the interpretation of Egyptian monuments, and in part on nineteenth-century emphases on the movement of peoples. The great Libyan invasion of the Delta in 1208 has been seen by some as a Volkswanderung, although the foreigners within the Libyan host would now appear to be barbarian auxiliaries rather than whole nations on the move. Drews then goes on (in Ch. 5) to challenge V. Gordon Childe's view—expressed in *What Happened in History* (1942) and *Prehistoric Migrations in Europe* (1950)—that the move from bronze to iron allowed, in Drew's words, “the most important shift in the class struggle in the five thousand years between the Urban Revolution and the Industrial Revolution” (p. 74). Drews claims that this metallurgical shift saw no major change in the art of war.
Moreover, iron does not appear to have come into widespread use for over a century after the Catastrophe (p. 75). However, instead of providing exact numbers of bronze and iron weapons, proportions are given (12th century, 96% bronze, 3% iron; 11th, 80% bronze: 20% iron; 10th, 46% bronze, 54% iron), and these may disguise problems with archaeological survival.

The explanation of drought (Ch. 6) bringing about the Catastrophe is traced back to Rhys Carpenter's 1965 Cambridge lecture, where it was asserted that "drought-stricken people" resorted to violence to feed themselves. There may indeed have been droughts and food shortages c. 1200, but at Pylos, palace accounts show that just prior to the Catastrophe "women and children were receiving, on average, 128 percent of their daily caloric requirement" (p. 81). Drews goes on to suggest that what shortages there were may have been due to raiders (p. 84). Drews dismisses the suggestion that palace organisations collapsed thereby causing the Catastrophe (Ch. 7). This theory seems to ignore the fact that the "Systems" were functioning "quite well on the eve of the Catastrophe", as evidenced by the scribal records from Ugarit (p. 89). Indeed, some systems were able to function after the Catastrophe: in mainland Greece, western Anatolia and Cyprus (p. 88).

The current hypothesis about raiders is seen as "undoubtedly correct but in its present form ... incomplete" (p. 91) (Ch. 8). Drews agrees with Bernie Knapp that the "Sea Peoples" were "an agglomeration of raiders and city-sackers", but suggests that instead of seeing their presence as a result of the Catastrophe they were the cause. He speculates why raiders suddenly became successful:

"A military explanation seems to provide all that is necessary. Shortly before 1200, barbarian raiders discovered a way to overcome the military forces on which the eastern kingdoms relied. With that discovery, they went out into the world and made their fortunes" (p. 93).

With those sentences, the reader is prepared for Part 3 (Chs. 9-14: "A Military Explanation of the Catastrophe") and Drews's main contribution to the debate about the Catastrophe ("So far as I know, the Catastrophe has never been explained squarely in terms of revolutionary military innovations" [p. 33]).

Ch. 9 ("Preface to a Military Explanation of the Catastrophe") discusses the problems in reconstructing military tactics at the time of the Catastrophe. Drews admits that prior to c. 700 BC "questions [about warfare] begin to multiply, and about the second millennium we are grossly ignorant" (p. 97). In spite of the criticism that he could be seen as "unprofessional", Drews asserts that "it is time that we begin to guess" about warfare in the Late Bronze Age (p. 98). The thesis which is to be tested is that in the Late Bronze Age kingdoms of the eastern Mediterranean a king measured his might in horses and especially chariotry.

"The thesis of the present study is that the Catastrophe came about when men in 'barbarian' lands awoke to the truth that had been with them for some time: the chariot-based forces on which the Great Kingdoms relied could be overwhelmed by swarming infantries, the infantrymen being equipped with javelins, long swords, and a few essential pieces of defensive armor. The barbarians ... thus found it within their means to assault, plunder, and raze the richest palaces and cities on the horizon, and this they proceeded to do" (p. 104).
Part 3 thus deals with Chariot Warfare of the Late Bronze Age (Ch. 10), Footsoldiers in the Late Bronze Age (Ch. 11), Infantry and Horse Troops in the Early Iron Age (Ch. 12) and Changes in Armor and Weapons at the End of the Bronze Age (Ch. 13).

Chariots are seen as mobile platforms from which archers could fire. The scale of this type of forces was apparently large. At Kadesh, the Hittite king could field 3500 chariots, and this was probably matched by Ramesses II (p. 107). The Pylos tablets mention at least two hundred pairs of wheels, and the purchase of wood for 150 axles, and so Drews suggests that a “typical palace at the end of the thirteenth century numbered in the low or middle hundreds” (p. 107). The evidence of tablets from Knossos appears to indicate that “the field strength of Knossos’s chariots must have been somewhere between five hundred and one thousand” (p. 108). After assessments of the possible costs in keeping a chariot in the field—including Stuart Piggott’s estimate that one chariot team would require 8-10 acres of good grain-land (pp. 111-2)—Drews turns to a speculative section on “How Chariots were used in Battle” (pp. 113-29). He rejects the view that Mycenaean chariots were of no use on the battlefield or that bows were a marginal weapon. Indeed he suggests that the large batches of arrows recorded in the Knossos tablets (6010 and 2630) were the “ammunition” for chariot teams (at 40 arrows a team) (p. 124). This leads to a reconstruction of chariot tactics (pp. 127-9) with lines of chariots charging each other and archers firing as they came into range; the point was to bring down as many of the opposing horses as possible. Drews goes on to argue that the Dendra Corslet was armor for a cavalryman as it is inappropriate for an infantryman (p. 175).

Drews considers the view that “Late Bronze Age chariotries fought in support of massed infantry formations” as “a misapprehension and an anachronism” (p. 137). For him infantry were needed more for campaigns in mountainous or rough terrain. This means interpreting the Pylos “Battle Scene” fresco as élite warriors in guerrilla combat with a group of barbarians (pp. 140-1, pl. 2). Drews sees the main function of infantrymen as a support group—“runners”—for the chariots, sent to finish off the wounded foe, as seen in the Kadesh reliefs from Abydos (p. 144 pl. 3). In contrast, the Early Iron Age saw an increased use in footsoldiers (Ch. 12).

Drews then discusses changes in armor and weapons at the time of the Catastrophe (Ch. 13). In particular, he notes the use of the javelin. This he argues could be thrown on the run against chariots; the thrower would be a moving target for the chariot-borne archer. In particular he notes that the blade was elliptical, which would allow it to be easily retrieved; this was especially important if only two were carried into battle. At the same time the Naue Type II sword was found in use in the eastern Mediterranean and was particularly good at slashing (p. 194). Its origins appear to lie in central and northern Europe. As the “raiders” on the eastern kingdoms seem to have used swords in large numbers—9111 swords were captured from the Libyan raid on Egypt in 1208—Drews suggests that the Naue Type II sword was adopted to meet the challenge (p. 201). In turn this development saw a move towards the use of large bodies of infantry.

Drews brings together the military strands of his argument in a closing chapter (14) on “The End of Chariot Warfare in the Catastrophe”. The increasing
emphasis on infantry weaponry suggests that those outside the kingdoms of the east had “found a way to defeat the greatest chariot armies of the time”; “raiders must have used javelins to good effect, destroying the chariot armies and ending the era of chariot warfare” (p. 210). Yet this reviewer is left feeling uncomfortable with this emphasis on military technology. The battle in which Meryre’s Libyan force was defeated by Merneptah in 1208 (p. 215: “The Catastrophe burst upon Egypt ... when Meryre ... ventured to invade the western Delta”) is often cited through the book. It does indeed provide important information. The Great Karnak Inscription (J. Breasted, Ancient Records of Egypt, vol. 3, no. 574) recorded the presence of Ekwesh (= Achaeans), Lukka (= Lycians), Shardana (= Sardinians), Shekelesh (= Sicilians), and Tursha (= Tyrrenhians, i.e., Italians) among the Libyan auxiliaries from northern lands (p. 49). Using his reconstruction, Drews envisages a major infantry force, armed with swords, confronting the Egyptian chariots. Moreover, the “barbarian” background of the auxiliaries would mean that they were skilled with the javelin, which could be thrown on the run against chariot teams. With this superior technology, Meryre expected to win: the count of severed penises and hands revealed that some 10,000 men of the Libyan force died, of whom 2201 were Ekwesh (p. 49). I do not understand the claim that “Meryre’s failure ... seems to have publicized the possibilities of the new kind of warfare” (p. 219). It seems hard to deny that there were military changes, but it might be that other factors were at work given that the new tactics were not always successful.

In addition to the archaeological evidence, Drews draws on a range of textual material which includes tablets from Ugarit, Linear B texts, and Egyptian inscriptions. Yet these texts only give a small glimpse of the wider problem: as one Ugarit letter recorded, “behold, the enemy's ships came (here); my cities (?) were burned, and they did evil things in my country” (p. 14). Linear B tablets provide inventory records for chariots. Yet there is no clear textual statement that the raiders of Ugarit were barbarian skirmishers who were able to overpower the chariot forces of the kingdom. However, Drews has been honest; he admits that he has had to guess in places. He has differentiated between evidence and speculation so that those who will continue to debate the Catastrophe can use the book effectively. What is more important is that he has laid to rest some archaeological factoids which in their turn were based on no more than guesswork.

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